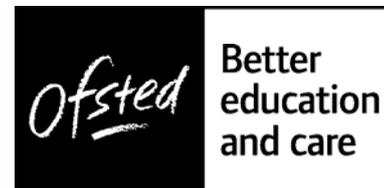


Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
Email [edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk)



Making Social Care  
Better for People



Mr Bryn Marsh  
Strategic Director of Children's Services  
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council  
Merton House  
Stanley Road  
Bootle  
Merseyside L20 3UU

**1 December 2005**

Dear Mr Marsh

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on the 28 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 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. The incidence of teenage pregnancy has declined since 1998 and is considerably lower than the national average. The proportion of schools participating in the National Healthy Schools Standards is high compared with the national average (90 out of 115) and includes all secondary schools. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively, and there has been a dramatic improvement in this respect, although indicators remain slightly below national averages. This improved outcome demonstrates more effective partnership working with health partners.

The actions taken to promote the mental health of children and young people are developing. Although the interface between the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the Youth Offending Team (YOT) is relatively well developed, the CAMHS team is not yet integrated in terms of all aspects of service delivery, despite recent developments which have included the joint commissioning of the CAMHS service by the authority and the two Primary Care Trusts. All relevant partners agree the CAMHS strategy.

## Staying safe

Although a number of outcomes are demonstrating very good performance by the council, there remain some important weaknesses. Children and young people are provided with the safe environment to which they are entitled. The authority's policies show good recognition of what constitutes a safe environment and their implementation is monitored consistently and rigorously.

In terms of child protection, procedures appear robust and all children and young people on the register have an allocated social worker and have had their cases reviewed in year. There has been an increase in the number of children on the register which is largely due to the low rate of de-registration by the council this year. However, this is in the context of a high number of referrals and assessments, which are undertaken by the authority. There continues to be a high percentage of re-referrals and this is a cause for some concern, although the authority have stated that there are some data collection issues in respect of this aspect of their work. This will require addressing over the coming year so that the integrity of the data can be relied upon. The authority undertakes very high levels of assessments and yet demonstrates very high percentages of initial and core assessments completed within the statutory timescales which is extremely positive and demonstrates a high level of multi-disciplinary working. The authority has clear referral systems; families and children at risk are identified early although it has been recognised that the thresholds have been low historically and that this is now being addressed by multi-disciplinary training and re-alignment of the process. The authority has reported that there has been a shortage of foster carers although this has not reflected particularly badly on their ability to deliver services. However, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of looked after children living with their parents, and whilst this is seen as positive, the figure is now considered quite high. The authority has reported issues around accessing court time in order to progress these cases and rescind care orders where appropriate. There has also been a sustained performance in the support for looked after children, all of whom now have had an assigned social worker since 2001/02. The authority's performance in relation to adoption has been particularly good and has built on sustained performance over the past three years. Protocols have been established between health education and social services in supporting looked after children and those with disabilities and special educational needs. Protocols with the health service are improving and good results are achieved in terms of the multi-disciplinary input to support timely completion of statements of educational need.

There is a clear process within the council for collating, monitoring and reviewing information from CRB checks. Responses to Section Eight reviews are monitored regularly by senior managers and elected members.

## Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. Early years provision is satisfactory and supports children well in enabling them to meet the early learning goals. There are effective support mechanisms in place to address weaknesses where they exist and the quality of provision is rigorously monitored.

Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are in line with national averages and at Key Stage 2 they are above the national and statistical neighbours' averages. Results at Key Stages 3 were strong up to 2003, being above those of statistical neighbours in English and mathematics. There was a slight drop in 2004 with overall results now in line with the average of similar authorities. The support provided by the education service in implementing the national strategies is effective and rightly focused on improving the achievement of underachieving groups and vulnerable children. Results at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) or equivalent have improved over the last three years and are now in line with the national and statistical neighbours' averages at five A\* to C and five A\* to G grades. Progress between Key Stages 1 and 2 is satisfactory but it is too slow overall between Key Stage 2 and GCSE. The authority is taking energetic action to address variability in performance between schools. Support is targeted effectively to improve the performance of specific groups and to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils; for example, the 'IMPACT' project includes a good range of pathways which supplement GCSE courses through quality work-based learning and training opportunities. Pupils with special educational needs have access to relevant courses and they achieve in line with predicted targets.

The proportion of looked after children gaining one or more GCSE at grades A\* to G is higher than the national average and similar authorities, but at A\* to C grades results require improvement. There is a continuing acceptable performance in relation to the attendance levels of looked after children. However, the authority demonstrated a significant improvement in its performance this year with some 88% of children looked after participating in their reviews.

Attendance is good and rates of exclusions are low, particularly in secondary schools. The authority is monitoring trends very effectively, with relevant plans in place for alternative provision and specialist support to improve behaviour in schools and reintegrate pupils into mainstream education or work. Reintegration rates are better than the national and statistical neighbours' figures.

There are sufficient suitable and accessible school places. A full review of surplus places is being conducted at present to address the above average levels of surplus places in secondary but particularly in primary schools where this issue is more acute.

There are currently no schools placed in a formal category of concern by Ofsted. Monitoring is rigorous and the authority's proactive approach and effective intervention ensures that schools are supported well before intervention is necessary with fewer schools being identified as causing serious concern.

There is an impressive youth engagement strategy involving a broad range of different agencies and organisations. There is a youth council that amongst other things manages the process of elections for the UK Youth Parliament. Overall around 5000 young people benefit from the work of the youth centres and outreach projects during the year. The authority has the largest numbers of Millennium Volunteers and the largest number of Duke of Edinburgh Award followers in the north-west region. In addition, there are over 300 young people aged 16 to 19 receiving certification for voluntary work.

In terms of youth offending, the recent joint inspection was promising in many areas and clearly identified that the authority was aware of both the strengths of the service and the areas for improvement.

### **Making a positive contribution**

Outcomes in this area are positive. The rate of youth crime overall has decreased between October 2003 and September 2004 and is below the national average. Rates of re-offending are also below national averages. The authority has a wide range of projects to combat first time offending and re-offending but their impact has not been analysed, although it does appear to be delivering good results.

Sefton has an extensive range of childcare provision; weaknesses are known and support provided to ensure that all settings become good, particularly in the way they engage parents. Schools contribute well to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and actively promote freedom from bullying and harassment. Pupils are encouraged to express their views through schools' councils and there are good examples of children and young people influencing decisions, which affect their learning and their school's environment.

The authority has reported very high levels (88%) of looked after children who contributed their opinions at reviews and this represents a significant improvement in this area and positive engagement with children looked after. The authority also reports that 100% of reviews of looked after children have been completed within statutory timescales. The local authority has put strategies in place to help all children and young people, particularly those with disabilities, special educational needs and those looked after to manage the transition between specific phases in their lives. There is some evidence of the effectiveness of the transition services for Year 9 pupils with special educational needs and those looked after in terms of access to employment, training and education and also housing. However, this is an area, which

may benefit from further work in terms of evaluation of its effectiveness. The authority has established a number of fora to elicit the views of children and young people, although there is no adequate system for eliciting the views of very young children.

There are many examples of how the views of children and young people have influenced operational activities. However the views of children and young people have not yet influenced policies sufficiently or been taken into account by elected members. Consultation with children and young people at a strategic level is now planned in the coming year in relation to formulation of the Children and Young People Plan.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

Outcomes in this area are good overall. There has been a significant increase in the percentage of care leavers in employment, training and education in the past year (79%). There is an encouraging take up of direct payments, which is in excess of that achieved by similar authorities.

The commitment to raising young people's awareness of the world of learning and the world of work is strong. The council demonstrates significant improvement with 93.4% of 16 to 18 year olds in employment, education or training. There is, however, a weakness in the general/vocational certificate of education (GCE/VCE), advanced and advanced subsidiary (A and AS) level examination results which, although improving, are below the national and statistical neighbours averages.

The support given to looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties or disabilities is good. There is strong commitment to ensure that transition at key points in their schooling is smooth. The Connexions service has good systems in place to ensure that all 13 to 19 year olds who are most in need receive one to one support so as to ease their transition to adult life and economic independence. Awareness of equality issues, including race, has been raised.

Collaboration between the authority, the local Learning Skills Council, schools, colleges and other providers is strong. These partnerships enable positive arrangements for ensuring the quality, breadth and relevance of the curriculum on offer for all young people aged 14 to 19. The quality of education provided for 14 to 19 year olds is satisfactory and the proportion of young people progressing to higher education or training is above the national average. The authority is aware of the need to reduce the variability in schools' performance and improve retention on post 16 courses.

## SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people</li> <li>teenage pregnancy</li> <li>the health of looked after children.</li> </ul>	
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>providing children and young people with a safe environment</li> <li>child protection procedures</li> <li>support for looked after children</li> <li>adoption services.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased local provision of foster carers</li> <li>re-referral rates.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>results at Key Stage 2</li> <li>strategy to support schools in difficulties</li> <li>implementation of national strategies to target underachievement</li> <li>attendance overall and that of looked after children in particular</li> <li>low rate of exclusion in secondary schools and good reintegration rates</li> <li>attainment of looked after children (1 GCSE)</li> <li>good range of recreational and voluntary learning provision.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>attainment of looked after children at GCSE A* to C grades</li> <li>surplus places in schools.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>looked after children contributing to reviews.</li> <li>lower numbers of first time offenders</li> <li>decreased re-offending rates</li> <li>reduction in youth crime over the 12 month period</li> <li>many young people can contribute through their school's council.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consultation at a strategic level with all children and young people.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• care leavers in education, employment and training</li> <li>• take up of direct payments</li> <li>• partnership working to improve breadth and quality of provision 14 to 19.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• results in the GCE/VCE A/AS level examinations</li> <li>• retention rates on post-16 courses.</li> </ul>
--	--

## **Service management**

The authority has collaborated closely with relevant partners in analysing needs and setting appropriate, challenging targets for improvement as contained in the relevant service plans. There is now an intention to consult widely with parents, carers, children and young people in order for the authority to take into account their views when establishing priorities for development, which will be contained within the Children and Young People’s Plan.

Sound progress is being made in moving towards the production of a single Children and Young People’s Plan from 2006 and this is being developed at this time. The current service plans are however considered robust in nature and include defined areas for improvement with clear plans of how these will be addressed indicating that the authority has considered the value for money aspect in its deliberations. The quality of the self-assessment was very good. It did identify strengths and weaknesses in a consistent manner. It clearly identified weaknesses and the attending strategies in place to address them. The document was outcome focused on the whole, although this competence will require further development.

The authority has developed strategies to increase collaborative work both internally and externally across a range of agencies and there are sound examples of services beginning to work together. An example is the joint commissioning of the CAMHS service by the authority and both Primary Care Trusts. The authority has experienced some issues around data collection in terms of social care and this has impacted upon the performance indicators and will require addressing in the coming year.

## **Areas for exploration in the joint area review**

### **Staying safe**

*The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:*

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

- determination of the level of re-referrals — is this a data or practice issue?
- strategy to retain and recruit foster carers.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

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

- progress on the 14-19 strategy and impact on outcomes.

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

- impact of strategies to raise standards of looked after children and underachieving groups.

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

- effectiveness of challenge, monitoring and training of early years providers.

### **Making a positive contribution**

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

- impact of the consultation with children and young people influencing strategy and policy (including minority ethnic groups).

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

- the support for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities.

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

- consideration of the effectiveness of support at times of significant transition.

### **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:*

- outcomes and achievement post-16, including retention rates on courses for young people aged 16 to 19.

### **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: Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements <sup>1</sup>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>3</b>
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	<b>3</b>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	<b>3</b>
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	<b>3</b>

---

### 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