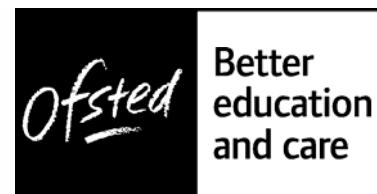


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr David Williams
Director of Education and Children's Services
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Williams

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 20 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

The outcomes in this area are good. There is evidence of positive partnership working with the local Primary Care Trust in promoting healthy living amongst children and young people. The council recognises that looked after children are a key vulnerable group and has therefore targeted resources to support their health care needs. A designated nurse has been identified who focuses on a range of preventative measures including ensuring up to date full immunisations, devising and reviewing health care plans, delivering sexual health awareness and maintaining links with school leavers who may not have good access to health checks, and raising issues with other agencies with regard to the health of looked after children.

The rate of teenage conception continues to be high within Reading, which is currently the second highest in South East England despite significant investment in the work with evidence of some reduction in the level. The council has ensured that resources are available to all young people in the area and has targeted groups which are seen to be most at risk. This includes specific work in schools with a range of drop-in and advice clinics. Reading is targeting actions and interventions to promote a message that teenage conception is both a male and female issue and provides support and guidance to boys and young men. School inspection data, although from a limited number of schools, supports this focus in that 100% of schools' were compliant with statutory requirements on sex and relationships education. There is also a sexual health clinic delivered at the Connexions Centre.

School inspection data, again from a limited number of schools, indicates that children's participation in sport is, on the whole, good.

The council is aware of the difficulties within the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS), a joint arrangement managed by Wokingham District Council, which resulted in closing the referral system during last year. The service was reopened in early 2005 for new referrals and Reading Borough Council is monitoring the situation to ensure that early warning of emerging capacity problems are identified and action is taken. The council is ensuring that all professionals are aware of the service, the route for referral and clear eligibility criteria. This should improve the appropriateness of referrals to the service thereby making best use of the resource.

Staying safe

The outcomes in this area are good. The council has made significant investment in child protection over recent years and the evidence from service inspection (March 2004) is that this is not at the expense of other core services. The council provides multi agency training at the basic level through a comprehensive training programme, which includes all staff who are likely to have contact with children and young people. Training is in place to support schools, including those in the independent sector where safeguarding of children and young people is identified as a training need.

The council has worked successfully with partner statutory agencies to agree an Information Sharing Protocol; this has now been agreed, having been implemented in April 2005. This will be a key feature in adding further safeguards to protect children and young people, as will the recently developed Local Preventative Strategy. There are systems in place to monitor how policies and guidance work in practice and the council is committed to reviewing casework against the statutory guidance. This recently included identification of weakness in the involvement of the voluntary sector in safeguarding children.

The council acknowledges the importance of preventative work and as part of this ensures good public awareness raising initiatives are in place. There is a detailed and easy access website which includes access to key information about Children and Young People, covering child protection information which is supplemented with leaflets available from the main council offices and partner agency locations.

The outcomes for looked after children as measured by the government's performance indicators show a steady and sustained improvement in some areas and significant improvement in others. This trend indicates that the council is monitoring performance and that the procedures to promote the well being of children are working.

The directorate has undertaken a review of the workforce and workforce deployment and has ensured that all looked after children and those on the Child Protection Register (CPR) have an allocated worker. However not all looked after children have an allocated qualified social worker but where this is the case the worker is specifically trained for the range of tasks to be undertaken and is managed and supervised by managers with social work qualifications. In the circumstances the strategies adopted by Reading for looked after children Social worker allocation are sufficient to ensure that essential safeguards are in place. The council views this as good deployment of resources and confirms the necessary and essential safeguards are in place.

There is positive management and monitoring of council provision, which includes residential homes, fostering, and adoption services, all of which at least meet the relevant national minimum standards.

The council has a strong reliance on foster carers and invests significant resources to ensure that they are well trained, supported and monitored to quality assure good outcomes for children and young people. The council is complying with the relevant guidance with regard to monitoring foster carers and is considering ways in which recruitment and monitoring can be extended to providers of supported lodging carers for school leavers thus enhancing protection to potentially vulnerable young adults.

The Children's Needs Index seeks to list all children and young people with a disability under the age of 18 years with a Reading home address to enable the council to plan support services for children, young people, parents and carers in the future. There is an established Disabled Children's Strategy in partnership with the Primary Care Trust to ensure that the social, educational and health care needs of children with disabilities are provided for. Reading Borough Council has implemented an Integrated Children's Electronic Care Records alongside the agreed protocol for sharing information on children and young people at risk. This should assist in the delivery of integrated services.

There has been some slippage in the number of children and young people looked after in foster placements or placed for adoption. The actual numbers involved in this decrease are, however, small, and can be accounted for by 3 placements which were made to mother and baby units. The council is aware of the issues and also has plans in place to recruit additional carers.

Enjoying and achieving

Although outcomes here are satisfactory overall, there are some important weaknesses in children's educational achievement particularly at Key Stages 1 and 3. The council is very aware of these and the Ofsted local authority inspection (LEA inspection) earlier this year confirmed these weaknesses.

Following the Ofsted inspection, the council was tasked to produce an action plan in July this year. A draft was made available to inform the Annual Performance Assessment process and it is clear that the plan is well founded, and that a number of important actions are already underway.

In respect of early years, the overall quality of provision is very good, and supports children well in enabling them to meet their early learning goals. There is good pre-registration support by the council to childminders and growth in the number of providers overall exceeds the national average. In sessional day-care the picture in both quantity and quality is more mixed. The council is aware of the reasons for this, and is confident its support to such settings is appropriate.

In respect of children's educational achievement and attainment at school, results at the end of Key Stage 1 are consistently below national averages and are below statistical neighbours in reading and writing. The council has identified transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 as a weakness and is taking steps to strengthen the quality and consistency of both the transfer process and the transfer of information. In addition further work has been commissioned on the possible impact of an earlier school admission age. The action plan in this area is appropriately detailed both in terms of implementation and monitoring plans.

Standards at Key Stage 2 have improved recently. Overall attainment is now in line with similar authorities. The council has followed a focused strategy in the last 18 months to improve results and this has resulted in some significant catching up with statistical neighbours. This progress has resulted in ministerial praise for the speed of improvement.

There was a worrying dip in standards at Key Stage 3 in 2004 but the council is confident this will be reversed in 2005. In mathematics, English and science - achievement is below national averages but in 2004 all dipped below statistical neighbours. The council is very aware of this and confident it does not represent a trend.

Between Key Stages 1 and 2 pupil's progress is about the national average. At Key Stage 3 pupil's progress is less than the national average. Overall this progress is not enough to turn around the performance of under-achieving pupils entering Key Stage 1. Results at GCSE reflect this picture with achievement consistently below national

averages, and, at best at the low end of parity with statistical neighbours. Too many children leave school with no GCSE's and the council performs less well than both national and statistical neighbours in these results.

There is underachievement at Key Stage 4 overall. The council has begun to implement its action plan in this area and has appointed a 14-19 adviser. The council has also made key decisions in planning to create a range of vocational opportunities which will be available from September 2006.

Underpinning all these initiatives is the revised school improvement strategy which is planned to increase challenge to schools and categorise support more accurately.

Personal education plans for looked after children lack detail and their quality is variable. As with the wider cohort of children, performance at GCSE is below both national comparators and statistical neighbours. The council has an action plan to improve the quality and consistency of personal education plans and plans to deliver appropriate guidance. The number of care leavers in employment, training or education at 19 is in the lowest band. The council has established a Parenting Panel to undertake the corporate parenting role of elected members but this work would be further enhanced by an improvement in the quality of information provided to them.

The council has taken positive action to improve attendance and in primary schools this has proved very effective. Secondary school attendance improvements are not yet embedded but the council is confident that significant improvement is imminent. The reasons for the rise in unauthorised secondary school absence are known to the council and a targeted programme has been put into place. The council has also taken positive action to reduce numbers of exclusions and this has had a positive impact. More recently there are signs that figures are rising again. The council is aware of the particular reason for this rise and is implementing a focused strategy.

The strategy and some implementation aspects of the special educational needs (SEN) policy were a major source of concern in the Ofsted inspection. The council has now completed its review of SEN funding and is implementing the impact of the findings. There are a number of detailed actions with a clear implementation plan and focused service priorities which are clearly led.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. The council is committed to involving children and young people at all stages and has recently reviewed a number of key protocols designed to engage looked after children. There has been an increase in the percentage of looked after children involved in their reviews and currently Reading is performing above the national target. The council has successfully deployed a team of independent chairs for all reviews of looked after children and this includes ensuring

that young people and their carers are involved in the planning process in preparation for the meeting and participating in the review. Information from the limited number of school inspections completed confirms that all schools inspected were at least satisfactory in promoting their pupils spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Again, in all inspected schools pupils were free from bullying, racism and other forms of harassment. In the wider arena the council has undertaken a wide-ranging consultation exercise with over 3000 children and young people. The information from this survey has been used to inform service developments.

The work of the Youth Offending Team has resulted in a positive impact on the level of re-offending rates which have seen a steady decline. The situation is less positive with regard to first time offending but overall it is recognised that this is a positive direction of travel. The council has been unable to improve on the outcomes of looked after children with final warnings, reprimands and convictions but some of the new targeted services will be made available to these young people and may divert them from offending behaviours.

The number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who express their views in their annual reviews is monitored. Resources including interpreters and the use of pictorial representations are available. This has resulted in a recent increase in those expressing their views, both for those placed within and for those placed out of borough.

There is a clear ambition to further shift from a consultative to a participatory approach in the involvement of children and young people. This is a policy shift, supported by members of the council's cabinet who have started a series of meetings with the Reading Youth Forum which will be expected of all commissioners and providers of services. The council is aware that this may be a challenge for smaller organisations and will therefore provide support to organisations and providers who would otherwise find this a difficulty.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. There is an established programme for providing access to paid work experience for looked after children 15-18 yrs. The council should be commended on this, as it is an important contribution to both economic well-being and also making assisting young people in making a positive contribution for this small group of young people.

All young people are tracked by Connexions until their 20th birthday (25th if they have special needs). If they are not in employment, training or education they are tracked every three months. However, the performance in respect of care leavers not in education employment or training at 19 years is rated at the lowest band although there has been marginal improvement since last year. The council is aware of each

young person in this cohort of seven children and is looking at ways to deal with the poor performance and views it to be an area of concern. Overall there is evidence of a positive focus on care leavers with all having an allocated worker and a pathway plan. Support for education and training is identified as part of the plan.

Although the overall judgement of the January 2005 Youth Service inspection was that the management of the service was inadequate, the standard of young people's achievement was judged adequate. The inspection found that young people were responding positively to well-planned sessions which enabled them to make progress in their personal and social development. Recent appointments have significantly strengthened the management team of the Youth Service.

The January 2005 Ofsted local authority inspection found that the support provided for 14-19 education was unsatisfactory. The inspection found that the LEA had been slow to effect change in the curriculum for 14-16 year olds and its review of sixth form provision, recommended in the previous inspection report, had also been slow. The council has responded quickly to these concerns. It had already appointed a 14-19 adviser, who has the confidence of key partners, and both a comprehensive strategy and developments on creating a wide range of vocational opportunities are well underway.

The inspection also identified a number of strengths including attainment by certain sixth form pupils at A level. Performance at A level is substantially better than at other Key Stages. Reading consistently outperforms its statistical neighbours in respect of the average points score per student.

Ofsted undertook an area wide inspection of 14-19 Education in Reading in June 2005. Whilst it shows continued concerns about standards at Key Stage 4, it found that the recently developed strategy for 14-19 education is good, much of council's work is satisfactory and that there are positive signs of improvement in a number of aspects of its work and that of its partners.

The council is under performing in comparison to other councils in the IPF group in providing access to direct payments for children with disabilities.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good partnerships with local Primary Care Trust • success in lowering the rate of teenage conception • positive promotion of healthy living across services • good performance in promoting the health of looked after children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access to CAMHS • expedite the current improvement in decrease of rate of conception amongst teenagers.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the council has robust child protection procedures in place and all those who have contact with children and young people receive appropriate training • evidence from the social care performance indicators shows overall improvement in monitoring and reviewing child protection cases relative to last year • the council is able to show evidence of good participation by schools including the independent sector in receiving child protection training. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve the number of children looked after in foster placements or placed for adoption • improve the number of adoptions of children looked after from local authority care • in addition to providing support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children ensure that mechanisms are in place to respond to the government proposals with regard to private fostering arrangements. • further develop the website for children and young people to ensure child accessible pages at all levels.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of Early Years provision • improvement in KS2 results • detailed action plans addressing known shortfalls • new capacity at management level driving initiatives forward. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transition to KS1 • variable performance throughout key stages • underachievement at GCSE • Performance at GCSE of looked after children and quality and consistency of personal education plans • impact of SEN strategy.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall the council via the YOT is making some impact on the level of re-offending rates but less so on first time offending. However, it is recognised that overall this is a 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve the level of final warnings, convictions and reprimands for looked after children.

<p>positive direction of travel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a range of key protocols in place designed to engage looked after children in reviews • independent chairs deployed for all reviews with an additional role to monitor/assess the level to which young people and their carers are involved in the planning process as well as participating in the reviews. 	
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children and young people using the Youth Service value the support it provides • youth workers are trained and committed to providing good outcomes for children and young people in a safe environment. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implement, monitor and review the Post Youth Service Action Plan • implement, monitor and review the 14-19 strategy • improve access to Direct Payments for children with disabilities.

Service Management

The outcomes for this area are good. There is a shared understanding and clarity of the strategic direction of the council in relation to the work of the new directorate at political, corporate and directorate senior management team. It will be important that the strategic vision is translated into action by front line staff.

There is evidence of well established and strong partnerships from the self assessment, priorities conversation and routine monitoring meetings. Strength of partnership working is noted in the Ofsted local education authority inspection report of 2005. This report also noted that priorities, especially in relation to raising standards of attainment, were well understood by key partners. There are also strong links with voluntary sector which is considered to be a key player in development of existing and new services.

The Ofsted inspection judged that leadership of both senior officers and elected members was highly satisfactory. It also noted the slow progress previously made on some strategies, for example special educational needs. However it was optimistic about this new joint directorate, and relatively new team, tackling weaknesses and bringing about improvement. Alongside this the council is realistic in assessing and responding to capacity issues and considering ways to deal with demands.

While there is no overarching needs analysis as yet there is evidence of positive preparatory work with all partner agencies but it is essential that an overarching or holistic needs analysis should be pulled together to fully inform the future direction.

However, from the evidence available it is clear that the council is realistic in assessing and responding to capacity issues and considering ways to deal with demands.

There is a shared understanding and clarity of the strategic direction of the council in relation to the work of the new directorate at political, corporate and directorate senior management team. The lead members with portfolio responsibilities for Education and Lifelong Learning and for Children's Services meet with members of the Directorate Management Team (DMT) weekly and receive frequent and regular progress reports. There is clarity of lead officer allocation and reporting mechanisms to address the recommendations set out in the recent inspection of the LEA. Performance reporting and management is a fundamental feature in these action plans.

The council has significantly more than the average proportion of schools with more than 25% of surplus places, particularly at secondary level. They have developed a plan to effectively address this issue. In particular the council has approved the closure of a secondary school and its replacement with an Academy in 2006. This will lead to the proportion of secondary schools with more than 25% places surplus falling significantly to 16.7%.

The council should ensure that the post Youth Service inspection action plan is implemented and monitored to ensure an overall improvement in the strategic and operational leadership of the service and improving value for money.

Areas for exploration in the Joint Area Review

Being healthy

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

- Determine if the joint working with health and the range of preventative work is showing an impact on reducing the rate of teenage conception.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

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

- Assess the impact of the strategy in increasing the number of foster carers/adopters.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- Judge the impact of improvement at Key Stage 1 brought about by consideration of changes to the age of admission and other action
- Determine the effectiveness of strategies in dealing with underachievement.

Making a positive contribution

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

- Monitor the range of activities and support available to children and young people who offend.

Achieving economic well-being

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

- Increase the number of care leavers in education, training or employment at 19 years of age.

Service Management

Capacity is used efficiently and effectively and is developed to deliver ambitions, priorities and value for money:

- Assess impact of strategy to reduce the number of surplus places at primary and secondary schools.

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: Reading 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