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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr John Nash
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Dear Mr Nash

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 4 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 good, and there is evidence of partnership working between the council's key services and local health organisations. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through schools, the youth service, leisure services and early years. This is demonstrated by, amongst other things, a strong focus on healthy eating in schools, most schools participating in the Healthy Schools Programme and good levels of participation in sport at schools. The inspection of children's services in late 2004 noted that Leisure Services promoted access to sports centres and cultural centres for children with disabilities and looked after children through discounted entry prices.

There has been a substantial fall in the under 18s conception rate, so that good progress is being made to meeting the 2010 target of a 45% drop in conceptions.

Waiting times for access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service have been reduced and access compares favourably to other councils in the South West region. There is a very limited number of social workers employed in the CAMHS service but it is acknowledged that social services funding is used to recruit other specialist staff which have been deemed to be more urgently needed by the multi agency steering group.

Looked after children's health needs are met. There is a specialist nurse for this group and a health worker who undertakes good work with care leavers around issues such as emotional resilience and self esteem which is to be commended. 98% of looked after children have health checks, which is above the national and IPF comparator average. Eighty percent have dental checks and more work is needed to ensure that their dental health is equally well served.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good. Children and young people are generally provided with a safe environment, except for an isolated example where an incident involving a child on the Child Protection Register (CPR) was not properly reported to the Area Child Protection Committee and the Commission for Social Care Inspection. This omission was rectified at the earliest opportunity. All children on the CPR and all looked after children are allocated to a social worker. There is advocacy support for all young people involved in the child protection process. The number of children on the CPR has fallen through proactive management and is now in line with the comparator average. The duration of children's stay on the register is good and almost all CPR reviews were undertaken within the appropriate timescale. There is room for improvement here and all reviews should happen at the stated intervals. Re-registrations on the CPR are much improved this year from last, but performance is still significantly worse than the national and comparator average. All schools inspected by Ofsted this year complied with child protection procedures. The ethnicity of children on the CPR reflects the ethnic make up of the population.

The percentage of both initial and core assessments completed within timescale has risen considerably since last year and both figures are now above the national and comparator average. There is good partnership working with the police, particularly around domestic violence. A policy and procedures are in place to visit and review private fostering arrangements with the same frequency as for looked after children. The borough has taken a whole council approach to the recommendations of the Bichard Enquiry and revised guidance is in place.

There is evidence that the quality of assessments varies considerably and action needs to be taken to ensure that they are of a uniformly high standard. It is acknowledged that a non-caseholding Senior Practitioner post is being created to focus on practice standards and that quality assurance is being further developed through case file audit and supervision.

Evidence from pre-registration visits by Ofsted inspectors demonstrates a variable pattern of pre-registration support to providers. This is demonstrated by the high number of actions given at pre-registration visits to some providers compared with the national picture. Whilst day care providers are receiving good pre-registration advice, training and support, some childminders in particular, and a small number of out of school clubs, are not receiving such a good service. However, there is evidence that the quality of registered childminders at inspection compares well with national comparators and this suggests post registration support for childminders is effective.

Looked after children have stable placements. This performance means that Poole is on track to achieve the LPSA target set in this area. There is a good rate of adoptions of looked after children (again meeting the LPSA target), although there could be improvement in the speed with which children are placed for adoption once the "best interest" decision is taken. The council is taking steps to review practice in this area. It is

acknowledged that the whole process of adoption from a child becoming looked after and an Order being granted takes a shorter time than the national average. All care leavers have an allocated personal adviser and all (with the exception of three asylum seekers over 18) have a pathway plan.

A recent social care inspection found that corporate parenting needs to become more widely established. Actions are being taken to increase the understanding of councillors, including the helpful input of looked after children to training events. There is evidence of some positive outcomes for this work in the way elected members are becoming involved in advocating on behalf of looked after children.

The children's social services inspection in 2004 found that there were good services for children with disabilities but that the threshold for entry into services was noted as being too high (see section on economic well being). There is a multi agency early years co-ordinator and a panel for children with disabilities or special educational needs to ensure co-ordinated support.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are very good. The quality of early years provision, both for services registered under the Children Act and those offering nursery education, compares well with national comparators. Poole's growth in early years providers and places is significantly less than the national pattern, with the exception of full day care where places are increasing at twice the national average rate. This is an unusual picture and whilst some of the growth can be attributed to transforming sessional places into full day care, this does not account for the overall decline in other types of provision, eg childminders. The relationship between this growth pattern and parental choice is unclear.

Most key stage results are good and children are making good educational progress. Results in 2003/04 at the end of Key Stage 1 for reading and writing are in line with statistical neighbours and above for mathematics. Comparisons with national data show that results for Poole are above the national averages for writing and mathematics and remain in line for reading. At Key Stage 2, results for Poole are above the national averages for English and science. For mathematics although results remain in line with national they are below those of statistical neighbours. Good progress is made between Key Stage 1 and 2. At Key Stage 3, performance in English is in line with statistical neighbours and at the national average. Mathematics is in line with statistical neighbours and the national average, although performance fell back from the previous year when it was above on both indicators. In science, performance is in line with statistical neighbours and above the national average. Progress is made by most pupils between Key Stage 2 and 3 but some low achievers make insufficient progress and the continued raising of standards of educational performance is an ongoing challenge. It is acknowledged that the council has a clear strategy for improvement and is implementing an action plan, for example by early identification of pupils at risk of not reaching

nationally expected levels from prior attainment, deploying specialist consultant time and giving additional support to those schools causing concern about standards of attainment. All schools receiving intensive support in 2003/04 had improved results in national tests.

Results at GCSE are consistently above those of statistical neighbours and the national averages. The number of young people achieving 1 or more A*-G grades and those achieving 5 or more A*-C grades is routinely above statistical neighbours and consistently above national averages. Almost all looked after children take GCSEs and a comparatively high proportion achieve 1 or more A*-G grades. There is, however, a lower number of care leavers who achieve 5 or more high grade GCSEs. It is recognised that the cohort of looked after children taking examinations is small, making statistical comparisons difficult, but the council must continue to strive to narrow the gap between the performance of looked after children and other 16 year olds.

Poole has a strong focus on attendance with targeted support for headteachers at its core. Overall attendance has improved year on year. The council is assisting headteachers to be more rigorous about approving absences, and authorised and unauthorised rates of absence are in line with those for statistical neighbours. Permanent exclusions in both primary and secondary schools compare very well with statistical neighbours and the national average. More pupils receive alternative tuition for longer than a school year than is desirable but this is explained by the council's practice of providing a long term mixed alternative package of education rather than re-integrate young people back into mainstream school provision. No children with special educational needs or looked after children have been excluded in the last two academic years. Poole is in the top quartile nationally for issuing statements promptly.

There are no schools in special measures or identified as having serious weaknesses in Poole.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. Inspections of early years providers show that the quality of nursery education is good and there is support given to providers of full day care.

Youth offending in the borough has fallen slightly. A protocol has been agreed around anti-social behaviour to ensure that young people at risk of anti social or offending behaviour are referred early to social services and targeted preventative work is offered by the Family Support Team and the Youth Offending Team (YOT). The rate of convictions and final warnings for looked after children however has risen and is above the comparator and national average, the performance indicator placing Poole in the lowest band. Whilst it is accepted that this is a small cohort and therefore liable to great fluctuation year by year, more needs to be done to reduce the offending of looked after children to the same level as other young people in the borough.

The majority of young people are given good support to manage change in their lives. The council has put in place many opportunities for young people to contribute to discussions about their future, including a Youth Forum. The 'Hear by Right' standards have been adopted. There is evidence that some decisions have been influenced by these contributions, for example the arrangements for looked after children staying overnight with friends have been amended. 86% of looked after children communicated their opinions in their statutory review last year, above the national and comparator average. There is good support to young people leaving care in the transition to adulthood, including an arrangement with housing that 10% of single tenancies are designated for care leavers, and other young people have their foster placement continued beyond the age of 18. All children with disabilities in contact with social services have a transition plan which is monitored and updated regularly.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good. The quality of education provided for 14 –19 year olds is generally good and the outcomes achieved by the most able are at least good and sometimes very good. Poole is working effectively with partners to increase curriculum options to extend choice for all young people. There are no inadequate sixth forms. There are lower levels of young people not in education, employment or training than the average nationally and in the South West region. Education and training provision is planned collaboratively with schools, the local FE college, employers and the Learning and Skills Council, and is informed by a good understanding of the local economy. Connexions advisers play an active role in assisting disabled young people make informed choices about their adult life. All disabled young people have a transition plan. The percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training is the highest in the South West region. The area inspection of 14 –19 provision (which covered Bournemouth and Poole) noted that a full curriculum, including vocational education, needs to be available for young people of all abilities. It is acknowledged that a 14 –19 strategy is in place for the borough and that this area is receiving attention. Low levels of carers of disabled children and 16-17 year old disabled young people are in receipt of direct payments and this needs to be addressed to increase their independence.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good partnership working with health • healthy lifestyles promoted • good reduction in teenage pregnancy rate • good performance in looked after children accessing health checks, immunisation. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more looked after children need to be able to access a dentist.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all children on the CPR and all looked after children allocated to a social worker • good partnership working between agencies • quality of day care provision at pre-registration • high percentage of assessments undertaken in a timely fashion • schools have child protection procedures in place • good support for looked after children, including stable placements and high rate of adoptions • good services for children with a disability. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • corporate parenting needs strengthening • pre-registration support and guidance to childminders and after school clubs • the quality of assessments needs to become more uniformly good • the percentage of children placed for adoption within 12 months of the best interest decision needs to be increased.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most key stage attainment is good and children make educational progress • GCSE results • no schools in special measures or serious weaknesses • good quality early years provision • most looked after children take GCSEs and a high proportion achieve 1+ A*-G grades • no exclusions in the last two years for children with special educational needs • prompt issuing of statements of special educational need. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the growth and range of early years providers and places • low attainers at KS2 making insufficient progress at KS3 • the proportion of care leavers gaining 5 or more A*-C grades in GCSE

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of nursery education and support to full day care settings • good involvement of young people, enabling their voice to be heard, including looked after children • good preventative work with potential young offenders • good support for care leavers. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the offending rate of looked after children.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14-19 education and training provision for the most able • low levels of young people not in education, employment or training • all disabled children have a transition plan. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities at 14-19 for those wanting vocational education • the threshold to receive a service from the social services disability team for children is too high.

Service Management

The authority has established a clear vision and strategic direction, with a well developed plan for the implementation of Every Child Matters based on a comprehensive multi agency review of children’s services undertaken by the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership in 2004. This demonstrates the strong commitment to partnership working, both within the authority and externally. The Director of Children’s Services has been in post since April 2005. Supporting young people is a strategic priority for the whole council.

There are robust plans for areas which require further improvement. These include combining two service units to release a senior manager (the former Head of the Youth Service) to manage and co-ordinate a multi agency approach to all services for children in the two most deprived neighbourhoods in the borough where outcomes are currently less good for children and young people than in other areas.

Consultation with children, young people and their parents is good and their involvement in service development is becoming stronger.

Workforce development is a key issue for the authority. There are low levels of vacancies for staff in both education and social services, although it is recognised that there have been difficulties in recruiting to some specialist and middle management posts in social services which has had an impact on front line service delivery in some areas of work. Expenditure on training in social services is lower than in comparator authorities and fewer social workers have attained the PQ1 award than average.

There is an insufficient awareness of the needs of the black and minority ethnic children in Poole, and this is reflected in the authority's self assessment where little reference is made to minority communities. This is an area which requires more attention so that the authority can be sure that outcomes for them are as good as for the majority population and that they are able to participate effectively in establishing appropriate priorities and culturally sensitive services.

The authority has a very complex system of school organisation, with children transferring to secondary education at 11, 12 or 13 depending on where they live. The council has begun the process of rationalising this structure, having received a mandate to effect change from an extensive consultation exercise. Despite adopting a sensible project management approach, this will inevitably require the attention of senior managers over the next five years and could lead to the loss of their good focus. As a small unitary authority, the council has limited capacity which will be stretched to deliver both continued good outcomes and the schools reorganisation.

Overall, the authority is in a good position to continue improving outcomes for children and young people.

Areas for exploration in the Joint Area Review

Enjoying and achieving

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

- the growth and range of early years providers and the support given to childminders at pre-registration

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:

- Children from black or ethnic minority communities are mentioned infrequently in the self assessment and plans and the extent to which they are being well served and achieving similar outcomes to the majority population needs to be examined

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

- Offending by looked after children is high in comparison with other authorities and in relation to other young people in the borough.

Final judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



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Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS
Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: Borough of Poole

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.	3
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
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