

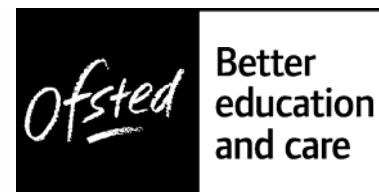
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Making Social Care
Better for People



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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Makin

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

This revised letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 27 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. We have taken note of the points raised by the council in response to our first draft of this letter.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. There has been good progress in certain key aspects but improvements are required in others.

The council participates strongly in the Healthy Schools programme. Good progress has been made in promoting the health of looked after children but the full range of routine health checks are not yet securely in place. The council has increased the contribution of social care staffing to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, but further development is required if this service is to meet the needs of its potential clients. There has been a significant reduction in the incidence of teenage pregnancy.

Partnership working is strong between the council and its partners and continuance of this will be essential if further progress is to be made. The council has a good awareness of the tasks that need to be tackled in further improving children and young people's health.

Staying safe

The council has made considerable progress since the 2003/04 Performance Assessment. Outcomes are now satisfactory.

The children's services inspection in November 2004 provided clear evidence that services previously deemed unsafe were now safe. The key performance indicators indicate that those children requiring protection are now receiving it. Some limited progress has also been made, albeit from a low baseline, in carrying out core assessments of children and their families within prescribed timescales. This is particularly commendable, as the numbers of core assessments carried out over the period have also increased.

Whilst there has been a slight improvement in carrying out initial assessments of children within prescribed timescales, performance is still weak compared with similar councils. During the annual performance assessment meeting the council described difficulties it has experienced with high numbers of referrals, mostly from the police concerning domestic violence. This suggests that the principles contained within the national framework for assessment may not yet be fully embedded, and that there is scope for further consolidation of an agreed partnership approach with the other agencies, as suggested in the recent Children's Services Inspection.

Whilst the council has, to its credit, put in place a number of systems to quality assure its processes, these are not yet having full effect. In November 2004 random inspection of files by Commission for Social Care Inspection showed that the proportion audited by managers was still low. Quality assurance is not yet entirely comprehensive and systematic.

The proportion of children in local authority care who have been adopted is significantly lower than last year. This is disappointing given that outcomes for children adopted are likely to be better than for comparable children. The council acts speedily once it has been decided adoption is in a child's best interest, but there is scope for it to consider carefully whether more of the children it looks after would benefit from being adopted.

Whilst the council made clear at the annual performance assessment meeting its aspirations to provide inclusive services to all members of its community, it is unclear from its self-assessment how it is realising those aspirations. While the council is mounting a number of culturally sensitive initiatives, such as its increasing use of direct payments, it is not clear that all of its social care services match the needs of the black and minority ethnic communities. At present black and minority ethnic young people are under-represented in the child protection system. Developments in this area will need to be a continued focus for the council over the coming year.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good.

The quantity of early years provision has increased well this year. The council contributes well to a secure strategy for supporting established providers, and the overall effectiveness of these settings is good. However, too many new providers are required by Ofsted to improve their provision at the registration stage, and the council should consider extending the support it gives to would-be providers.

Key Stage 1 standards are mostly in line with similar areas, but there has been a recent decline in standards of writing. At all other key stages standards are fully in line with similar areas, and are improving, most notably in Key Stage 2 English and mathematics. The improvement rate at Key Stage 3, however, is too slow, and the school improvement service is rightly planning to modify its support programme accordingly. The progress pupils make from age 11 to age 16 is slightly below the national median, though they pick up speed well at Key Stage 4. The attainment of the two largest minority ethnic groups is improving relative to the overall population. It should be noted, though, that despite the steadily improving standards across the borough, Oldham pupils still perform below national averages on many measures.

School attendance has improved and is in line with that in similar areas. The rate of exclusion from school is reducing. The attendance at school of children looked after by the council has improved, as has their academic performance. Young offenders' involvement in education, training or employment is above the relevant national average. The youth service provides a wide range of facilities and programmes, leading to good standards of achievement by increasing numbers of young people.

The council gives good support to schools and to vulnerable pupils. Its challenge to schools is strong, and on balance is well-targeted, with a good overview maintained of schools' cost-effectiveness. Support for pupils from minority ethnic groups is an effective element in the council's school improvement work. The provision of school places is in line with need, and success in meeting parental preferences on admissions is high. Statements of special educational need are prepared rapidly, and the number of these is kept sensibly low. Pupils who have been excluded from school receive full-time tuition before, in most instances, reintegration to school.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory.

The extent of the council's community cohesion work is considerable, and the number of reported racist incidents has dropped considerably.

Children and young people have a good involvement in planning and shaping services. This includes some innovative work. The council has received a community care award for young people's involvement in training.

The council's achievement within the Youth Offending Team (YOT) in steering young people away from crime has been generally good. However, the YOT recognises that it still has considerable work to do concerning those involved in regular and serious offending. The proportion of young people looked after by the council who are involved in offending is also a concern.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good.

The rate of post-16 participation in education has improved, as has the rate of participation in education, training or employment. Sixth form students aged 18 and over achieve standards above the national average. Lower-achieving young people make good progress on New Start and Entry to Employment courses.

The council has worked very well in partnership with schools and other agencies in broadening educational provision from 14 to 19. A useful link has been established with higher educational provision. The proportion of 14 to 16 year olds undertaking vocational courses has increased. The council has also developed some innovative work with vulnerable young people. The progress of looked after children and those with learning difficulties or disabilities is monitored regularly. The youth service promotes vulnerable young people's personal development well.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership working to promote the healthy lifestyles of young people • recent improvements in promoting children and young people’s mental health • recent improvements in reducing teenage pregnancy. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further work to promote children and young people’s mental health • further improvement to the health of looked after children.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvements to services, particularly in child protection, to the point where they are now deemed safe • limited progress in improving the speed of assessments. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further embedding the principles and timescales contained in the national framework for assessment • decision-making concerning placing children who are looked after for adoption • ensuring that all social care services are appropriate to the needs of black and minority ethnic communities.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of childcare • steadily improving standards at most key stages • standards of achievement in a broad range of youth service activities • school improvement work • school admissions and the provision of places • support for vulnerable groups of pupils. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards of writing at Key Stage 1 • the rate of improvement at Key Stage 3.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consultation with young people • the extent of community cohesion activities • young people’s involvement in managing and planning youth service activities • the extent of opportunities for sport • the decline in recorded racist incidents. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • re-offending by serious and long term young offenders • offending by looked after young people.

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the attainment of sixth formers • the proportion of young people continuing with education or training or entering employment • improvements in participation in education and training by vulnerable young people • partnership working at 14 to 19. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the extent of the use of direct payments for young people with disabilities.
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Service management

The council has a strong ambition to further improve its services for children. In education it has a good track record of consistent improvement and some innovation and the sense of purpose is so clear that this is likely to continue. However, its improvements in social care are only very recent, deriving from the work of new senior managers, supported by an external team in response to previous unacceptably low standards; this has now led to improved procedures and some better outcomes. However, it has not yet led to significantly better outcomes overall. It is too early to determine whether or not the new systems in social care will in fact produce generally better outcomes.

The council currently has interim management arrangements for children’s services and is in the process of establishing a new organisational structure. It is intended that this would give high priority to continuing and extending the already strong links with partners, and focus on a range of objectives reflecting the full range of provision for children. Political commitment to a new integrated structure is strong and this augurs well for future developments. The council has funded education well in the past and has now committed new funds to the social care aspects of children’s services.

The council now has generally secure systems for identifying the needs of the local population — good in the case of education. It consults well with children and young people, and in some instances has learned from this and adapted its services. It has learned well from external inspections and has made creative use of the external team supporting its social care work. Overall, the council now has an accurate understanding of its own strengths and weaknesses. Its educational work is guided by good performance management and quality assurance, though this needs further development within social care.

The council has adequate 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

- the action taken to ensure that the CAMHS service is comprehensive.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

- the speed of assessment of children and families.

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

- action taken to meet the particular needs of black and minority ethnic communities.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- action taken to promote improvement at Key Stages 1 and 3.

Making a positive contribution

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

- actions taken to reduce recidivism and to reduce offending by looked after children.

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: Oldham 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	2
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.	2
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	2

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