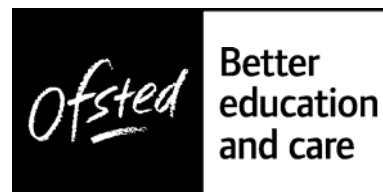


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr G Curran - Chief Executive
London Borough of Merton
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Curran

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF THE LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON
EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005**

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 22 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 overall. The teaching of personal, social and health education in secondary schools is effective in promoting healthy lifestyles. There are suitable plans to train further staff, although there remain shortfalls in the numbers trained in relation to government targets. In primary schools, the programme for sex and relationships education is in line with the National Healthy Schools Standard. Teenage pregnancy rates have improved, as has the conception rate for those under 18 years, and are below the national averages. Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection is a strength. Policies and procedures in schools are firmly in place. Any concerns raised during the regular cycle of health and safety inspections are followed up diligently. All children and young people with disabilities have suitable transition plans. More looked after children have regular health checks. There is a co-ordinated and integrated approach to the provision of services for this group. The nurse for looked after children provides sexual health, healthy eating and 'can't cook, won't cook' sessions at Merton College. A 'Healthy/Fun Awareness Day' was held for children and young people of different age groups and foster carers which promoted 'being healthy'.

The council has sound plans to ensure at least 75 per cent of schools are delivering the Healthy Schools programme by March 2006. Drinking water is readily available in schools, with the recent launch of bottled water in primary schools with the school logo and fountain water in secondary schools. The council recognises the scope for integrating

sports initiatives and healthy school meals in an effort to combat childhood obesity. There are insufficient Child and Adolescent Mental Health service workers to meet the current level of need, but the council is on track to improve staffing by September 2005. The planned appointment of specialist workers will provide a dedicated and expanded capacity to respond to the emotional and mental needs of looked after children and young people aged 16 plus. Additionally, there is a behaviour and attendance strategy in schools to help children and young people deal with conflict and personal stress.

The council recognises the scope to integrate and address the Every Child Matters agenda for 'being healthy' which informs the development of the Children's Single Plan 2005-06.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good. Every performance indicator for child protection is in the top national band. There is a well established Area Child Protection Committee, which is being restructured into a Safeguarding Board as required by the Children Act 2004. The area child protection committee has fully adopted the 'London Child Protection Procedures' which are widely distributed and supported by training. All reviews of child protection plans are completed within the agreed timescales and all schools are meeting the area child protection committee requirements. The time which children spend on the protection register has fallen due to rigorous monitoring and review. The policies governing inter-agency procedures are relevant, comprehensive and regularly reviewed. The council has developed 'Safe Parenting' and 'Parenting Your Teenager' handbooks. The council promotes race equality effectively by monitoring and reporting racist incidents in schools. There is a good tracking system to monitor the whereabouts of all children and young people, including those who are looked after and those who are on the child protection register. The Common Assessment Framework and Child Concern model has helped the council to improve the timescales for initial and core assessments, but it is recognised that there is still capacity to further improve performance.

The council has a 'Listening to Children Officer' in post to ensure that their concerns and complaints are heard and they are safeguarded. There is a website, which is pre-loaded onto personal computers that are given to all looked after children.

There is good co-operative working between services to support social inclusion.

Support for the education of pupils other than at school is good. Provision has been substantially improved by the establishment of a Pupil Referral Unit. The current re-integration rates are twice the national average. The school placement panel has been particularly innovative in responding to children at risk of exclusion.

A pilot project to improve behaviour in primary schools has successfully reduced poor behaviour and is being extended to selected secondary schools. The level of exclusions has reduced and is broadly in line with the national average.

There are policies and procedures in place to monitor missing children. Every year the council places a missing persons' notice in the local paper to encourage the help of the local community. Joint work with the International Social Services monitors children on the Child Protection Register who have moved abroad.

While bullying has not been reported as a cause for concern, the council recognises that more information is needed and has carried out a confidential audit in one school, which identified some issues and produced an action plan. There are plans to expand this to other schools and involve the Children's Fund.

The strategy for special educational needs is satisfactory. The direction of this area of work is sound. The inspection of special educational needs in 2004 noted the slow pace of change and the lack of an implementation plan identifying how key changes are to be achieved and funded. This has been rectified and special educational needs is linked appropriately with an ongoing review of social inclusion, development of common protocols for all schools. A review of the special educational needs spending formula and improved monitoring arrangements have been agreed.

Enjoying and achieving

Overall outcomes in this area are good. There are several strengths in this area, and weaknesses are being tackled systematically. Although attainment remains too low, the most recent test results indicate improvement. The issue of low standards of young people's achievement, which was identified in the Ofsted inspection in 2004, is being addressed robustly.

The number of childcare providers is increasing faster than the national figure; the rise in full-time day care is particularly notable. Childminders are effectively prepared for their role. The quality of early years' provision is satisfactory overall. In the Foundation Stage, achievement in communication, language and literacy is low in more than a half of schools. At Key Stage 1 in 2004, the results in reading and writing fell from above to below the national average and that of statistical neighbours. There was a less significant fall in mathematics, where the results were broadly similar to national figures.

At Key Stage 2 in 2004, the results in English and science fell; they rose in mathematics, where intervention had been focused. A programme of support for identified groups of pupils, including girls and black pupils who are underachieving, has been implemented. At Key Stage 3 in 2004, the results were similar to the last three years in English and science, and rose slightly in mathematics. While the gap with national figures widened in all three subjects, the un-validated results from 2005 indicate that lost ground has been regained. Differences between schools are, however, significant; in 2004 three performed well above national figures, three were broadly average and two were well below.

At Key Stage 4 in 2004, results rose slightly for the third successive year at five or more A* to C, but remain below the national average and well below that of the statistical neighbours. Underperformance by schools in the east of the borough and pupil mobility across borough boundaries depress the overall figure. There is underachievement in black and mixed ethnicity groups and among girls, although the council's data management systems are robust and enable schools to identify and target individual pupils.

The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, who are educated in mainstream schools, is above the national average. The vast majority of assessments are completed on time and the quality of individual education plans is good. Data on the pupils' progress is used well, enabling 80 per cent of the pupils to reach their agreed targets.

The proportion of looked after children achieving one A* to G and five A* to G at GCSE is higher than the national average. Those who are unable to attend school are always provided with alternative education. Support for this group is good; a team of qualified teachers provides additional support such as music and drama lessons, revision and holiday classes. There are 'flying tutors' to support looked after children in education. For children and young people for whom an academic approach is not suitable, there is focus on practical training and qualifications, such as motor mechanics, construction and boxing. The council found that white, working class boys had the most need for this programme.

In the youth service achievement is unsatisfactory; too much of the centre-based work is dominated by recreational activity and there is too little focus on learning. The council has taken prompt action to rectify the weak management of the youth service, placing the service within the well-performing social inclusion unit and placing greater emphasis on achievement.

In primary schools, the pupils' attitudes and values are generally good or very good. In secondary schools, attitudes are similarly positive, with the exception of the school placed on special measures. The level of authorised absence in all phases has fallen from well above average in 2002 and is now in line with the national figure. The level of unauthorised absence is also falling and is now in line with the national median. Permanent exclusions in primary schools are well below the national average, but in secondary schools they are well above the national figure and that of statistical neighbours. The pupil referral unit and other providers offer an appropriately balanced curriculum and full-time education for poor attendees.

There are good opportunities for enrichment in the majority of schools across all phases. The youth service successfully engages high proportions of young people from minority ethnic communities. There are effective partnerships to support leisure and recreation, including voluntary organisations such as Dean City Farm. The council's sports and arts development teams run a year round programme of events particularly focused on children in challenging circumstances.

Support for schools placed in categories of formal concern by Ofsted is effective. The council has provided extensive support and direction for the school in special measures, including monitoring, setting targets, advice and training. The appointment of an interim executive board has strengthened the governance of the school. The identification of underperforming schools and subsequent intervention are highly satisfactory, with a reducing number of schools below the floor targets than in 2004. There is a robust process for monitoring and reviewing the progress of schools causing concern. The mobilisation of funding from the London Challenge to assist schools causing concern, and the council's proposals for Academy status for two schools in the borough, are suitable strategies to address underperformance.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. Social inclusion strategies are successful, providing effective support for vulnerable groups. In all relevant performance indicators, the council is improving at a rate faster than the national average. The majority of looked after children are placed in mainstream schools.

The provision of school-based extended services, with two full-service schools, has increased access to child-care provision. There are appropriate plans to extend this number to twelve.

Children and young people are involved in decision-making, including contributing to key appointments in schools, work-shadowing headteachers, improving school meals and recycling initiatives. They are also members of a youth forum, enabling them to engage with elected members. The work of the youth offending team is effective, complemented by a good multi-agency approach. Re-offending rates are falling and are significantly below the national average.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good overall. There is good co-ordination of provision for 14-19 year olds, although the range is small. A post-16 review has been completed, making thoughtful and well considered recommendations to extend local provision, aligned to the development of two academies with joint post-16 provision, particularly targeted at the lowest-performing areas of the borough. These have been endorsed by the Local Learning and Skills Council which has agreed to fund a co-ordinator for the next stage of development. The council leads the 14-19 local learning strategy, which includes the college of further education, Connexions, training providers, sixth forms, the education business partnership and the Aim Higher network at Kingston University. The quality of education provided by the two schools with sixth forms is good. The standards achieved by the students are in line with national averages and above those of statistical neighbours. For both schools the value-added from GCSE is high.

There is a specialist child and adolescent mental health services worker for black and minority ethnic young people. Sound plans have been made for vulnerable young people, including alternative courses in schools, the pupil referral unit and other providers for Year 11 pupils.

The rate of students progressing into full-time post-16 education is above the national average. The number of young people not in full-time education, employment or training has reduced, but is still too high. An externally funded project to improve access to post-16 education for refugees, asylum seekers and excluded and vulnerable young people has been successful.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people looked after children nurse support engagement via healthy fun days. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> established area child protection committee providing children and young people with a safe environment support for looked after children racist incidents monitored. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> initial and core assessments.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the proportion of pupils with special educational needs who are educated in mainstream schools is above the national average looked after children's educational attainment is higher than the national average "flying tutors" to support looked after children in education the youth service successfully engages a high proportion of black and minority ethnic children and young people sports & arts development team is well integrated. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> educational achievement for white, working class boys under performance by schools in the east of the borough council's proposal for academy status for two schools.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • majority of looked after children are placed in mainstream schools • social inclusion strategies are successful • children and young people are involved in decision making, including key appointments in schools, work-shadowing headteachers, improving school means & recycling initiative • youth forum engages with elected members. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good collaboration with local skills council in delivering post 16 education and training • good co-ordination of provision for 14-19 year olds • joint post 16 provision targeted at the lowest performing areas of the borough • specialist child and adolescent mental services worker for black and minority ethnic children and young people • sound plan in place for vulnerable children and young people, including alternative places in schools, pupil referral unit and other providers for year 11 pupils. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p>

Service management

There is clear support from cabinet members and leadership from senior managers to address the Every Child Matters agenda. The council's ambition is to achieve an excellent Comprehensive Performance Assessment rating by 2006 through delivering high quality services to residents and customers. Robust corporate plans are in place.

The council has clearly defined priorities and is aware of its direction of travel. It aims to improve outcomes for looked after children. It is developing a collaborative approach to help children and young people with special needs. Access to timely integrated, high quality, multi-disciplinary mental health services will be improved. The council will embed the Child Concern model and sustain safeguarding. The council intends to raise achievement, with a particular focus on the east of the borough. A collaborative

approach to hold the year on year rise in obesity in under 11s is being developed. The council aims to reduce the involvement of young people in offending (as perpetrators and victims) and decrease their fear of crime.

The council has good capacity to improve. The new Children, Schools and Families Department came into operation in April 2005. An interim director is in place and the post will be filled permanently in October 2005. There is good engagement with other agencies and stakeholders.

The council has an effective performance management framework which links individual service plans to departmental, corporate and national performance. Departmental management teams hold quarterly performance board meetings. The leader and chief executive hold 'star chamber' reviews with directors and cabinet portfolio holders to discuss quarterly progress towards targets and priorities.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

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

- expansion of the Child and Adolescent Mental Team.

Staying safe

Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:

- safeguarding of all children and young people.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- educational attainment for all children.

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 with proposals to develop two academies and to extend the range of post-16 provision in the borough.

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

Cc. Mr Dave Hill - Director of Children, Schools and Families

APA final judgements 2005: London Borough of Merton

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