



Medway Youth Service Report

Medway Children's Services Authority Area

**Better
education
and care**

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Introduction

1. Medway Youth Service operates from five youth centres. In addition, provision is made through detached and outreach work, a programme of outdoor education, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. The youth service also supports the work and young people engaged with the Youth Parliament. There are three senior managers in the youth service, 14 full-time and 59 part-time youth workers which equates to a full-time equivalent of 32.8 youth workers. Included in these figures are two Personal Advisers who are seconded by the Connexions partnership to work with young people in schools and in relation to health matters. The youth service serves a 13-19 population of 24,000 and is based in the recently established Young People Division within the Children's Services Directorate. The service estimates that 18% of young people in the age range are reached. The budget allocated by the local authority in 2005-2006 was comparatively low at £1.44 million. The service attracted external funding of £164,000 in the same year.

2. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service in Medway. Inspectors considered the self-evaluation report of the youth service and met with a cross section of staff from both within the youth service and the council. Inspectors reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observation of a small sample of youth work sessions in the two neighbourhood study areas as well as other observations of practice across the borough.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. The service is inadequate and provides unsatisfactory value for money. Strategic and operational management are unsatisfactory. While arrangements for quality assurance and performance management are weak, these weaknesses are acknowledged and identified in a realistic self-evaluation report. Action is now being taken to resolve the problems. Overall young people's achievement and the quality of youth work practice are satisfactory. Documentation to support the curriculum is poor and fails to guide the workers sufficiently. In the absence of a needs analysis and a clear set of priorities, there is no rationale for the deployment of staff and resources across the service. There are opportunities for young people to be involved and influence local projects and activities but young people do not participate in the governance and management of the service. The youth service is providing effective support however to young people attending school councils and the youth parliament. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is popular and well managed and there is a comprehensive programme of outdoor education. Accreditation levels are good.

Strengths

- Outdoor education programmes offers a broad range of accredited courses with good specialist equipment
- The popular Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is well-managed
- The youth service provides effective support to the young people attending school councils and the Youth Parliament
- Positive action is being taken to deal with the problems and issues, identified in the self-evaluation report, relating to the leadership and management of the youth service

Areas for development

- Conduct a detailed needs analysis to determine a set of priorities for the work of the service
- Improve young people's achievement and the quality of youth practice
- Improve the quality of leadership and management of the service
- Increase then range of targeted work
- Establish an effective quality assurance and performance management system
- Involve young people in the governance and management of the service

Key aspect inspection grades

Key aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	2
	Quality of youth work practice	2
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	1
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	1

The table above shows overall grades about provision. Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale:

Grade 4: A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 3: A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 2: A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

Grade 1: A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users.

Part B: The youth service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes

4. The youth service is making an adequate contribution to outcomes mainly through centre-based and project work. Youth work is enabling those who participate to develop their skills, confidence and self-esteem. A number of youth centres place a strong emphasis on healthy eating. Much of the work at the two outdoor education centres promotes the importance of healthy lifestyles. The youth service provides effective support to young people attending inter-agency

projects targeted at specific issues including parenting and personal safety. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme supports young people's work in conservation and fundraising. The youth service, through its support for young people attending school councils and the Youth Parliament, has been effective in developing the voice and influence of young people across the council.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice

5. The standard of young people's achievement overall is satisfactory. Those young people who participate are keen to take advantage of the opportunities on offer. At Woodlands Youth Club, members involved in the planning and evaluation of the activities were able to identify what they had learnt over a period of time and the accreditation they had gained. They had excellent relationships with one another, with staff and other adults. Senior members demonstrated high levels of self-confidence and personal development. Three young women, involved in a project designed to consider some of the implications of parenting, stayed at the centre over a weekend and had responsibility for the care of a 'cyber baby' which was programmed to cry if not cared for appropriately. Together with the young women, the staff discussed aspects of parenting and the aspirations of the young women at the start of the weekend and evaluated what they had learnt at the end.

6. School councils and the work of the Youth Parliament, supported by the youth service, have been very effective in developing the voice and influence of young people across the council. At Parkwood Youth Club, for example, young people were involved in the planning of activities through the members' committee. They had recently presented their views on a nearby park regeneration scheme, with the support of local traders, to council officials. At a meeting of the Kent and Medway Young People's Safety Forum, the young people were self confident, articulate and demonstrated a good knowledge of the issues facing young people. They contributed thoughtfully to discussions, earning respect from others members at the meeting.

7. The service supports a good range of national and locally accredited programmes including GCSE, NCFE, Youth Achievement Award, Junior Sports Leadership Award and the BTEC early years qualification. Most of the opportunities for accreditation are provided through the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and the outdoor education programme.

8. Overall youth work practice is satisfactory. There are examples of very good practice in which the work was well-planned, accredited and where staff provided a secure environment to support the development of young people. The Urban Detached team demonstrated good youth practice when working with a group of young people presenting some challenging behaviour. The workers were able to

build a good rapport with the group and were actively involved in negotiating and planning a number of different activities. Young people attending a sailing session at the outdoor education centre developed their skills and confidence through practice, and undertook a series of well-managed and structured activities that were organised by well-qualified, enthusiastic and motivated staff. By contrast in the poor and unsatisfactory sessions there was little evidence of purposeful interaction between the staff and the young people, they were led by inexperienced and unqualified staff and insufficient attention was given to planning and review.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The range of provision is inadequate. In the absence of a detailed needs' analysis, there are no agreed priorities to direct the work of the service. There is a limited amount of issue-based project work but little is targeted at specific vulnerable groups, young people with special needs and young people from black and minority backgrounds. Much of the provision is based on five youth centres, which are distributed unevenly across the borough. The service provides detached work, an outdoor education programme and manages the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, all of which are better targeted. Documentation to support the curriculum is poor and fails to guide workers sufficiently.

10. Accommodation is good. The five youth centres are attractive, kept in good order and provide an environment appropriate for the needs of young people. There is, however, very limited provision of information and communication technology (ICT) resources and equipment. There is a well-stocked staff resources library. A Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act 2001 audit has been carried out and action is being taken to resolve problems regarding access in some locations. There are clearly stated procedures for child protection, which are well understood by staff. The self-evaluation report acknowledges that policies for equal opportunities and health and safety are not consistently applied and further work needs to be carried out through supervision and training to ensure improved practice across the service.

11. Most, but not all, full-time staff hold a nationally recognised youth work qualification. There is a good range of in-service training opportunities which includes a strong emphasis on equal opportunities and diversity issues. The service has established effective progression routes for young people with eight senior members becoming part-time workers. There has been a good response to staff shortages through the "workers in training initiative". The number of staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds is low. Job descriptions have not been revised in the light of recent changes stemming from the creation of the Children's Services Directorate.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

12. Strategic and operational leadership and management are inadequate. The strategic importance of the youth service in supporting council policies and in meeting the five outcomes of Every Child Matters is unclear. There are a few general references to the contribution of youth work in supporting and implementing the Medway Children and Young People's Plan for the period 2006-2009. A draft service plan for Youth, Health and Action 2006/09 is in place but it is too early to assess its impact. There is no rationale for the deployment of staff and resources across the service.

13. Arrangements for quality assurance are under-developed. There is a draft quality assurance framework which makes general reference to the five outcomes of Every Child Matters. Some, but not all, of the elements identified in the framework are in place. A programme of in-house inspections, involving young people, has recently been introduced. Quality assurance procedures relating to specific areas of work are good. For example, the work of the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme is closely monitored through effective staff supervision, the collection and analysis of data, careful monitoring of practice and the publication of a detailed and informative annual report. However, more generally, information gathered through the quality assurance process is not used in a systematic way to monitor performance or to influence the direction and priorities of the service. There are good opportunities for young people to be involved and influence local projects and activities, but their involvement in the governance and management of the service is insufficient.

14. Partnership arrangements between the youth service and local voluntary and community organisations are satisfactory. There is, however, no strategic or joint planning to ensure the resources of the youth service and voluntary bodies are used for the benefit of young people. The youth service distributes a helpful newsletter which provides information relating to events and training courses to over 250 voluntary organisations in the Medway area each term. Insufficient attention is given to the monitoring and use of grant aid by regional and sub-regional voluntary organisations. There is good inter-agency liaison between the youth service and other children's services providers, particularly in project work. Despite the existence of a partnership agreement, there is a degree of confusion regarding the roles and areas of co-operation between the youth service and the local Connexions partnership.

15. Medway youth service has experienced a number of problems and difficulties over the last two years, particularly in respect of the leadership and management of the service. The weaknesses are acknowledged and identified in a realistic self evaluation report. Positive action is being taken to resolve the problems but it is too early to judge whether the actions taken have been effective. Overall, the service is inadequate and offers unsatisfactory value for money.