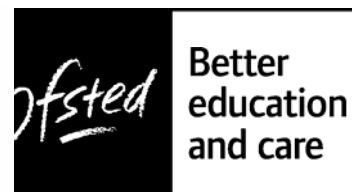


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
Email: edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Miss Ann Windiate - Director of Health
and Community Services
Mrs Rose Collinson – Director of
Education and Leisure
Medway Council
Civic Centre
Strood
Rochester
Kent ME2 4AU

1 December 2005

Dear Colleagues

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 25 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. Healthy lifestyles are promoted effectively through good partnership working between key services. A major survey of 4,000 children and young people is contributing to strategy development and a range of initiatives are being implemented to engage hard to reach groups. There are some innovative schemes that are having an impact on identified risks including obesity and road traffic accidents. A high proportion of schools are participating in the Healthy Schools Standard and there are targeted programmes to address risks from smoking and drug and alcohol abuse and to reduce teenage pregnancy. Participation of pupils in sport is mostly good or very good. The particular health needs of children and young people from black or minority ethnic groups and of children with disabilities have not been identified.

Counselling services are provided co-operatively through excellence clusters and an integrated team provides support for language development. There is timely referral of non-acute cases from the Youth Offending Team to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The CAMHS tier 2 service is still relatively new, and it is too early to determine its impact. The proportion of looked after children who have health and dental checks is good. However, in order to help develop their independence, young people over 16 years of age are allowed to exercise their discretion and there has been some deterioration in the proportion having health and dental checks over the past year. The council should review this practice to promote the optimum balance between good health outcomes and choice.

Staying safe

Performance in this area is generally satisfactory. A number of fundamental funding and staffing constraints continue to present real challenges. Although the council has responded positively to the recommendations of the SSI and CSCI inspection reports of 2003 and 2004, the volatile patterns of referrals/assessments/registrations on the child protection register/allocations of children and young people indicate that the service is not yet stable.

There is a high number of children in need cases held on duty, and a high number of unallocated cases of children in need. However, it is noted that there has been significant improvement in the rates of unallocated cases across all areas since the SSI and CSCI inspections, particularly since January 2004. For looked after children, the proportion with a named qualified social worker is low, although it is noted that a number of staff have now received their qualification certificates. The proportion of initial and core assessments carried out within required timescales is not satisfactory.

Child protection indicators are generally good and very good. However, a recent Serious Case Review report indicates some serious shortcomings in social work practice. The council is responding positively to the Review's recommendations, which include the need to improve the training of social workers in the implications of parental substance misuse, and of managers and supervisors in supervising and managing of risk assessments.

Placement arrangements for looked after children have improved over the last year. Outcomes are now generally good and very good, although the rate of children placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision is too low. Children are looked after in stable settings, with a good proportion staying in the local area.

Appropriate management action to address weaknesses is in hand. An action plan that was implemented following the SSI/CSCI inspections is regularly monitored and updated, and most actions are now complete. The plan has been regularly monitored at officer and member levels within the council and with the CSCI Business Relationship Manager.

Childcare placements are safe, and the incidence of bullying in schools and of road traffic accidents is low.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. There are sufficient early years education places to meet the needs of three- and four-year olds. Expansion of provision is in line with the national trend although out of school places have decreased significantly in comparison to national growth. The proportion of unacceptable nursery education settings is higher than average and some children do not make sufficient progress in language and literacy to prepare them for school. The proportion of pupils achieving level 2 in writing and reading at Key Stage 1 is below average. The trend is improving in mathematics but remains just below average. Key Stage 2 performance is consistently below average and the progress pupils make between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is just below average. The strategy for supporting the implementation of the national literacy strategy by schools has been revised and there is better targeting of support in proportion to the level of need. Intensive support provided for specific schools has been effective. Provisional data for 2004/05 indicate significant improvement in the outcomes for all the core subjects.

Standards at Key Stage 3 have improved steadily and are at or above statistical neighbour averages. Value added between Key Stage 2 and 3 is just above average. Pupils perform well at Key Stage 4. A higher than average proportion achieve 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C and at least 1 grade A*-G. However, pupils make below average progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. In comparison to girls, boys perform poorly and strategies to bring about improvement have yet to have an impact. The rate of care leavers achieving one or more GCSEs grade A*-G improved to a good level in 2004, and is in line with similar councils. However this rate remains significantly lower than the population in general. The proportion who achieve 5 or more grades A*-C is above the average for similar authorities. The council has identified the need for further improvement and is monitoring the progress of looked after children more closely and providing additional support.

The proportion of schools in formal categories of concern is above average but reducing. School improvement services are successful in removing schools from special measures within a reasonable period of time. The council recognises that it has been less effective in supporting schools to prevent them being placed in formal categories. School self-evaluation procedures are now more rigorous and the council's procedures for monitoring and intervention have been strengthened. No school has been placed in a category this year.

Strategies for reducing unauthorised absences have been effective and rates are well below average in both primary and secondary schools. Attendance of looked after children is good. Exclusion rates are reducing but continue to be high and rates of re-integration are below those of similar authorities. Strategies for preventing exclusions from primary schools have been very effective. The proportion of pupils who received alternative tuition for more than 12 months is also above average.

Support for learning outside school day is mostly good or better. A growing range of activities is provided through the youth service. A good range of opportunities enable children and young people to participate in sport and recreational activities during the summer holidays. Children with special educational needs achieve well and special schools are developing a wider role in supporting pupils with complex needs in mainstream schools.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes are satisfactory overall. The council is strong on consultation and in involving children and young people in the political process. This is indicated by: a very good rate of looked after children who participate in their reviews; effective transition planning between primary and secondary level; holding conferences for children, themed events around "*Every Child Matters*"; the Youth Parliament and representation in council decision-making. The results of a major lifestyle survey of 4,000 children are currently being analysed and will inform service development.

The council has implemented a number of actions to improve the transition for young people leaving care and for children with disabilities moving to adulthood. These include the appointment of additional Personal Advisers in the Connexions service and transition workers in both children's and adults' social care teams.

The work of the Youth Offending Team has not been fully integrated into the council's services, and following a recent inspection, funding and operational arrangements have been reviewed. Encouraging progress has been made in reducing levels of crime by

3.98%. Further action is required to improve data collection, use of data, and the setting and monitoring of targets to improve assessment outcomes. The rate of final warnings and convictions of looked after children has increased significantly and performance is now unsatisfactory.

The council uses Children's Fund services to improve access to services for hard-to-reach groups, including those from black and minority ethnic groups.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. An appropriate range of advice and guidance services is provided for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities and they are well supported through the transition to post-16 education, training and employment. The proportion of care leavers progressing to education, training or employment has improved and is now very good.

The quality of education provided for 14-19 year olds is satisfactory and the proportion of young people continuing in education or training at age 16 is good. However, drop out rates at age 17 are too high and, despite well-structured initiatives to bring about improvement, progression rates to higher education are low and have only shown modest recent improvement. Clear strategies have been established, in partnership with further and higher education providers, to improve the opportunities for young people to follow higher education courses locally. Collaboration with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Connexions service is good. Through partnership working the needs of the area have been researched well and a satisfactory strategy for improving the education and training opportunities developed. However the rate of implementation of the strategy is too slow and, although the range of 14-19 curriculum opportunities is improving, it does not ensure equality of access to provision that meets the needs of young people across the area. The accountabilities of local consortia of schools and further education and work based training providers for implementing improvement strategies are not clear. Average point scores achieved by sixth form students are higher than those achieved by students in sixth forms in similar authorities. The progress students make between Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 in the majority of school sixth forms is in line with or better than that predicted by their GCSE results, although some students underachieve in even the high performing grammar schools.

The rate of carers of children with a disability and children with a disability that receive direct payments is well below the average for similar councils.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good targeted initiatives for health promotion • strong partnership working. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • health checks for looked after children.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most performance indicators relating to child protection have improved to a good level • stability and security of placements are very good • performance indicators for looked after children in different settings are either good or very good. A good percentage of children are looked after in foster placements • percentage of looked after children aged under 10 in foster care placed within the council's boundary. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very high number of cases held on duty • timely completion of initial and core assessments • rate of children in need cases unallocated for over 3 months • the percentage of children placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision • child protection practice issues identified in a recent serious case review.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards at Key Stage 4 • improvements in attendance • examples of partnership working to improve achievements • reduced rate of looked after children absent from school. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of early years settings • attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2 • high rate of exclusions • performance of boys • educational achievement of care leavers.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensive consultation and involvement arrangements • high numbers of looked after children contributed to a statutory review • involvement of the Youth Parliament in the scrutiny process of council cabinet. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transition planning for care leavers and for children with disabilities moving to adulthood • operational arrangements of the Youth Offending Team • rate of final warnings and convictions of looked after children.

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishment of local campus involving three universities to improve local access to higher education courses • rate of care leavers in education, training or employment • agreed 14-19 strategy • initiatives to improve progression to Higher Education. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accountabilities in the 14-19 Consortia • vocational opportunities at end of Key Stage 4 • speed of implementation of 14-19 strategies • equality of access to 14-19 curricula that meet young peoples' needs • rate of carers of children with a disability and children with a disability that receive direct payments.
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Service management

The council's capacity to improve outcomes for children is adequate.

The council is responding appropriately to the requirements of the Children Act 2004. It has a very good history of partnership working within the (unitary) council, with the Primary Care Trust and other agencies. Work is in hand to produce a Children and Young People's Plan for January 2006, beginning with an extensive survey of need planned to take place in the autumn. The council is on track to implement an integrated children's service in April 2006.

Planning for children's services is pragmatic, with priority given to areas of greatest identified weakness. A comprehensive multi-agency Children and Young People's Strategic Plan 2003-2006 provides the framework. There have been other drivers for change. These include: the need to respond quickly to the SSI/CSCI inspections, the financial pressures of the council, difficulties in filling vacancies, and the requirements of the Children Act. Officers and elected members regularly review progress and outcomes. The 14-19 strategy is satisfactory but is not being implemented with sufficient urgency.

The council's financial and staffing position creates some major challenges for the delivery of children's services. Across all social care measures of budget and expenditure on children and families, Medway is in the bottom quartile of similar councils. There are areas of high vacancy rates in social care and in education.

Performance management systems are robust, and the council makes effective use of IT to share information within and between Directorates, and with other agencies.

There is clear evidence of improvement in a number of areas. However, improvement is not yet comprehensive across either education or social care, and there are some areas where performance is below that of similar councils. The council has established further improvement as a key priority.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

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

- development and progress of the new CAMHS Tier 2 service.

Staying safe

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

- links with adult services, particularly in relation to parents with mental health and substance misuse problems
- eligibility criteria and resource allocation.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- impact of the council's review of children with disabilities.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- impact of the strategy for school improvement.

Making a positive contribution

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

- Youth Offending Team and links to social care and education.

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:

- development of the 14-19 curriculum.

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: Medway 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.	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	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