

Luton Youth Service

Luton Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Contents

Introduction	2
Part A: Summary of the report	
Main findings	2
Part B: Commentary on the Key Aspects	
Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice	4
Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources	5
Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management	6

Introduction

1. Luton youth service forms part of the Access Division of the Borough Council's Children and Learning Department. The majority of the service is delivered directly by the council with a minority being delivered in partnership with voluntary organisations. Provision is primarily located in six youth centres distributed evenly across three areas. Four youth centres are located on school sites. The service is managed by a principal youth service manager and three area managers. There are 34 full-time equivalent posts. The budget for 2007-08 is £1,595, 501 and is broadly consistent with national averages. There are around 18,600 young people aged 13 to 19 in the local area. A high proportion of the youth population is of Black and minority ethnic heritage. In 2006-07, the service reached 22% of 13 to 19 year olds.

2. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which provides that the Chief Inspector may inspect particular local authority functions. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

3. The local authority sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. Young people achieve high standards and there are a few examples of outstanding achievement. The quality of youth work is good, with a strong focus on developing and extending knowledge, skills and attitudes. Young people gain valuable social and political skills through participating in decision making in their own clubs and at a strategic level. The service has secured a good balance between targeted and universal provision. It works successfully with a wide range of vulnerable young people, but there is little in place to promote access for young people who are looked after by the local authority. The service is responsive to the needs of minority groups. It has successfully secured good access and outcomes for these young people through targeted provision and partnership work. However, capacity building with other potential providers in the voluntary sector is limited. The curriculum is confidently implemented and closely aligned with the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes. Accommodation, with the exception of one centre, is generally welcoming and in good condition. Service-wide and area plans are consistent with the priorities of the Borough Council and the Children and Learning Department. Implementation is thoroughly monitored and performance management is good. The quality and performance of the service has increased significantly as a result of a well conceived range of measures to secure improvement. Recently introduced management information systems enable accurate assessments about cost-effectiveness. Adequate arrangements for health and safety are in place, but a small number of risk assessments are not completely appropriate to the needs of users. The youth service's role in the provision of educational leisure-time activities is central to plans for establishing integrated youth support.

Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	3
	Quality of youth work practice	3
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	3
3	Leadership and management	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: excellent/outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate/satisfactory; 1: inadequate*

Strengths

- Young people achieve high standards and develop a good range of knowledge and skills.
- The quality of youth work is good, with a strong focus on learning and achievement.
- The curriculum framework is well understood by all staff and is confidently implemented.
- The promotion of diversity and social cohesion is outstanding.
- Good quality assurance arrangements result in continuous improvement.
- Performance management is good.

Areas for development

- Promote the access and participation in youth work of young people in local authority care.
- Develop, and implement, policies and procedures for the delivery of drug education.
- Develop arrangements for capacity building with potential providers in the voluntary and community sector.
- Ensure that risk assessments are appropriate to the requirements of specific groups of young people.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

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

4. Standards of achievement are good. Most young people achieve well and there are notable examples of outstanding achievement.
5. Young people develop valuable skills such as teamwork, communication and problem solving. They develop skills in specific subjects such as drama, media production, music and the use of Information and Communications Technology. For example, young people attending the Bangladeshi Youth League are developing a video on disability aimed at raising awareness of this issue in schools and their community. They were articulate in describing the project, their reasons for initiating it and their learning.
6. Young people also learn about issues that affect their lives such as sexual health, relationships, drug and alcohol misuse, bullying, anti-social behaviour and gun and knife crime. At Lea Manor Youth Centre a group of young men discussed sexual health maturely and made suggestions, backed up with convincing arguments, about how the C-card condom scheme could be improved.
7. Young people generally participate in youth service programmes regularly and enthusiastically. They are proud of their youth centres and keen to speak about what they have learned and achieved. They value opportunities to have their learning recognised and accredited. The achievement of nationally accredited awards has increased significantly during the past year and is currently above national benchmarks.
8. Young people are enthusiastic in taking up positions of responsibility as volunteers, peer educators and for leading specific activities. Others develop a good range of skills through being involved in youth centre committees. For example, members of Starlight Youth Centre developed useful political skills whilst successfully campaigning against the closure of their centre. They met the council's Executive Committee and are now working with councillors to identify an alternative venue. There are opportunities to develop these skills further in area and borough-wide reference groups and Luton Youth Together for Everyone (LYTE), the youth cabinet.
9. The quality of youth work practice is good overall. Youth workers understand and implement the educational principles of youth work; providing support, challenge and enabling young people to have fun while they develop social and personal skills. They understand the priorities of the service; know the needs of their area and those of the young people with whom they work. In the best practice, youth service priorities, young people's needs and aspirations underpin challenging learning programmes. Relationships between staff and young people are positive; effective codes of conduct are negotiated with young people. Youth

workers are aware of specialist sources of support and work in partnership with other agencies, such as alcohol and substance misuse services.

10. The recently introduced curriculum planning procedures are used in all settings and result in a focus on the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes and the contribution to *Every Child Matters* outcomes. However, there is insufficient recording of the progress made by groups and individual young people.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of curriculum and resources is good. The youth service is primarily delivered through six youth centres, a mobile unit and detached youth work. Generally, accommodation and resources are in good condition and suitable for work with young people, although only half the premises are fully accessible to young people with mobility difficulties. There is a good mix of learning opportunities that meet the needs of young people. The curriculum is well co-ordinated and supported by thorough performance management, supervision and regular observations of youth work.

12. The newly revised curriculum framework is well linked to *Every Child Matters* outcomes. A highly successful training programme ensured that staff understand the curriculum and consequently implement it successfully. Generally, staff are well trained and effectively deployed. There is a strong focus on sexual health and drug education and the quality of this work is good. However, there is no policy for drug education or procedures to support staff in dealing with drug-related incidents.

13. Young people's voice and influence is particularly strong at unit level and, through the work of LYTE, at a strategic level. However, it is too early to judge the impact of the recently developed borough-wide and area reference groups in securing young people's involvement in decisions about youth work in local areas and across the borough.

14. There are an outstanding range of programmes that explore diversity and promote social cohesion. A diverse ethnic mix was observed in most settings and relationships between young people from different backgrounds were invariably good. Provision targeted at Black and minority ethnic young people secures their participation in proportions that reflect the demography of the local area.

15. Inclusion is promoted well through targeted work with young offenders, young people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion from school, gay, lesbian and bisexual young people, those with disabilities and young parents. Separate provision for girls and young women improves their access to the service. However, strategies to promote the participation of girls and young women in mixed settings are underdeveloped. There is little in place to promote awareness of the youth service and access to it amongst looked after young people and their carers.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Leadership and management are good. The service is valued in the local area and the council establishes a strong sense of strategic direction. Planning and reporting procedures ensure that elected members and strategic managers are informed about the performance, quality and progress of the service. The youth service plan is well linked to corporate and departmental priorities and implemented through area and unit plans. Needs assessment and performance management are good.

17. Progress towards establishing integrated youth support is satisfactory; timescales are realistic but challenging. The local authority has identified risks and is working to minimise them. The integration of the youth service and Connexions is at the centre of these plans. The combined services will be delivered directly by the local authority. The budget for youth work is adequate and broadly in line with national averages. It is allocated to each of the three areas according to sensible formula.

18. Young people's involvement at a strategic level is good; the Youth Cabinet led a consultation about the Children and Young Peoples' Plan and is involved in staff recruitment. There are a very good range of initiatives for ensuring inclusion and equality through, for example, targeting services at vulnerable young people and groups of young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Effective partnerships with voluntary organisations secure high quality youth work that creates good access and outcomes for young people of South Asian heritage.

19. A partnership with the Primary Care Trust results in a wide range of training to support the delivery of health education and the C-card scheme in all youth work settings. At Lea Manor School a well conceived multi-agency initiative has resulted in vibrant school-based health facilities located in the youth centre providing young people with access to advice, information and a wide range of services. However, measures to support and develop the capacity of youth work providers in the local voluntary and community sector is limited.

20. Policies to ensure that staff and young people are provided with safe and healthy working environments are in place and routinely implemented. Staff are trained and are confident in applying safeguarding procedures. Effective risk assessments are carried out in all settings but require refinement in a small number of specific cases to ensure they are appropriate to the needs of the target group.

21. The service has taken measures to improve its quality and performance. This has resulted in significant increases in rates for participation and reach. Arrangements for observing youth work practice, developing unit improvement plans and monitoring progress are valued by staff at all levels and have resulted in tangible improvement. The introduction of effective data collection systems provide detailed information about performance and now the service is in a position to make accurate judgements about its efficiency and cost-effectiveness.