

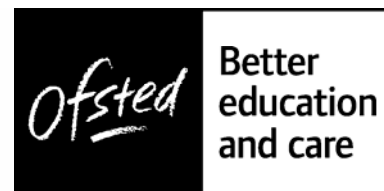
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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Paul Curran
Director of Children's Services
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Curran

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 6 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. Partnerships, for example with the primary care trust, are strong and effective in providing a range of co-ordinated initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles. These are both influenced by and accessible to children and young people. The healthy schools programme is of good quality and reaches just over half the schools, in line with the Government's 2006 target.

The council acknowledges that the incidence of teenage pregnancies is too high with no evidence of reduction. The latest strategy to tackle the problem has been assessed by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit as including a good range of services and activities for prevention and supporting high-rate areas and vulnerable groups. Moves to improve access to vocational opportunities for 14-16 year-olds and initiatives to raise ambition and self-esteem, are also positive developments.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) teams have an increased and comparatively good level of input from social workers and children in every secondary school and pupil referral unit have access to CAMHS support. Analysis of the health of black and minority ethnic groups has indicated that there are no significant differences in their take up of services. Even so, a number of projects with black and minority ethnic communities usefully have a health dimension. The health needs of looked after children are addressed well. Performance in this area has been sustained and remains very good.

Staying safe

Outcomes for this area are good and reflect considerable improvement. Children and young people, including looked after children, are provided with a safe environment. Freedom from bullying is at least satisfactory and the Safer Schools Partnership has contributed to a reduction in serious incidents in and around schools. However, in spite of the authority's efforts in developing a clear framework and providing relevant training, around a fifth of schools are currently not submitting returns on bullying and harassment linked to racism. The council is working with schools on the reasons for the lack of reporting and is also consulting with the pupil parliament on innovative ways for pupils to raise their concerns about bullying, where these are not being addressed by schools.

Incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised and agencies work well together. There is a robust approach to the implementation of multi-agency child protection arrangements and ongoing review to ensure their fitness for purpose. Proposals for the establishment of the safeguarding board are being progressed. Although not high in number, serious case reviews have been effectively handled over the past year through multi-agency collaboration.

Quality assurance arrangements and accountabilities are clear and effective. The percentage of re-referrals to social services continues to fall but remains higher than similar authorities. Nevertheless, more referrals to social services are now being assessed within the required timescales for initial and core assessments. Performance, particularly on core assessments, compares very well with levels nationally and in similar authorities. The council recognises the need to focus now on the quality of assessments.

The number of children in local authority care is falling, although is still comparatively high. The council has been able to achieve a more efficient and effective balance between caring for children in a family setting, including delivering preventative and child protection arrangements, and taking children into care. Decisions about the long-term arrangements for children in care are being made more quickly. There is an increased and broader range of family settings available particularly for younger looked after children, resulting in comparatively high placement stability. However, placements are less stable for those looked after for four or more years. The percentage of children looked after in residential settings remains comparatively high and the percentage of those who are adopted is too low. The good range of support available for children with disabilities has meant only a small number of these children are looked after.

The improvements above mean that staff are more able to focus on the areas that need their expertise. All looked after children and those on the child protection register are allocated to a qualified social worker. Staff sickness and vacancy levels are comparatively low.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area improved in 2004 and, overall, are now good. Although performance at Key Stages 1 to 3 remains below national levels, better tracking of individual pupils' progress, close monitoring of teaching quality and good targeting of support have resulted in significant improvement at Key Stages 2 and 4.

Young children have good access to high quality early years provision and this supports them well in meeting their early learning goals. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are below similar authorities, but standards, especially in mathematics, are improving. At Key Stage 2, the rate of progress made by pupils is well above the national average. In 2004, the standards achieved by Turkish and mixed-race pupils improved significantly, as did the performance of pupils in schools which the authority had specifically targeted for improvement. At Key Stage 3, the progress made by pupils is slower, particularly for boys and Bangladeshi pupils. However, over the last four years standards have improved more quickly than nationally and, in 2004, targeted support resulted in notable improvement in the performance of Turkish and black African pupils. At Key Stage 4, the priority given by the authority to increasing the percentage of students achieving five or more passes at GCSE grades A*-C was reflected in much improved results. Performance is now in line with similar authorities and much closer than previously to national levels. The proportion of looked after children achieving this level is higher than nationally.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities are helped to enjoy and achieve as a result of the clear strategy for inclusion built around developing mainstream school capacity, a cogent role for special schools, good partnerships with other agencies and good monitoring of pupils' progress. Attainment as measured by the proportion of pupils achieving five or more passes at GCSE grades A*-G is, however, well below the national level.

Although attendance in schools is below national levels, there have been improvements in both unauthorised and overall absence rates in both primary and secondary schools. The overall rate of permanent exclusions has sharply reduced and fixed-term exclusions are also on a downward trend. However, re-integration rates are below those of similar authorities and nationally and opportunities for 14-16 year-olds to learn once excluded from school are being hampered by weaknesses in the Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit.

Support for schools placed in formal Ofsted categories of concern is good. The number of schools identified has fallen sharply and no Islington school currently requires special measures. In the past, the authority has not always been sufficiently proactive in identifying and tackling emerging weaknesses in schools. However, monitoring is now more rigorous and the overall standard of leadership and management in schools has improved.

Children and young people have access to a good range of recreational and voluntary learning opportunities including enrichment activities at school, through the extensive youth service provision and a range of other projects and initiatives.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes for this area are good overall. Children and young people have many opportunities to express their views and to contribute to the authority's decision making. Young people were consulted extensively during the development of the children and young people's performance plan. In 2004, over 150 children and young people were also involved in shaping and designing a web-site providing an accessible directory of services available to children and families.

Children are encouraged to contribute and participate through the 'Listen Up' project, which incorporates a young people's forum, building on the earlier pupil and youth parliaments. Looked after children receive good support from the Children's Active Involvement Service which enables them to express their views about the services they receive. They are also well supported at points of transition, with 93% actively involved in their statutory reviews.

School leavers receive useful support from learning mentors. Teenage girls benefit from assertiveness training and young parents are well supported by co-ordinated support from council services and partnerships. An ethnically diverse group of young carers aged 6-17 also benefit from a specific project run jointly with a neighbouring local authority and local health and social care mental health trust.

The rate of youth crime committed by re-offenders is falling, with the percentage of youth offenders on full-time entry to employment programmes is above the national average. This reflects some of the good work done by the much improved Youth Offending Service to raise the self-esteem of the young people and to discourage re-offending. In contrast, there is some (but limited) evidence to suggest that crime committed by first time offenders is rising, against recent national trends. To address this, 'acceptable behaviour contracts' are being promoted as alternatives to anti-social behaviour orders, although it is currently too early to judge their impact.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good overall. However, there are weaknesses in the local 14-19 strategy and with respect to the high number of young people not in education, employment or training post-16.

Looked after children are supported well in preparing for life after school and there has been a significant rise in the numbers of care leavers in education, employment and training post-16 and those progressing to university. However, the overall number of young people not in education, employment and training post-16 is above national levels. The wider use of individual learning programmes and the expansion of work-related opportunities at Key Stage 4 are helping to improve access to both careers guidance and work-based learning. The Sixth Form Consortium has expanded its curriculum and the closer links developed between the authority and the local Further Education college are helping to create new learning opportunities. The 14-19 strategy is under-developed and, for children with special educational needs seeking entry level and Level 1 accreditation in sixth forms, there are significant gaps in provision.

There is good targeted support for vulnerable children and young people through support for unemployed parents and the use of direct payments to families with children that have particular needs. Families and young parents also have priority access to housing and employment support from the council.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partnership with the primary care trust • health of looked after children • support for children with disabilities • quality of the healthy schools programme and support for sport in schools • drugs awareness programme in primary schools and screening of young offenders. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing the level of teenage pregnancies.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction in serious incidents in and around schools • falling number of looked after children • improved focus and effectiveness of preventative services, child protection arrangements and work with looked after children • partnership with schools and other agencies • audit and review mechanisms • targeting of minority groups. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring all schools submit returns on bullying and harassment linked to racism • improving placements for longer-term looked after children.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high quality early years provision • improvements in performance of schools at key stage 2 and the proportion of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C at 16 • improvements in the performance of children from some minority ethnic groups • improvements in the performance of schools targeted for support or intervention • improvements in pupils' attendance • children's access to enrichment, recreational and voluntary learning opportunities. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving pupils' progress at key stage 3 • improving the proportion of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-G at 16.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities for young people to be involved in/consulted on developments that affect them • percentage of looked after children contributing to their statutory reviews • involvement of learning mentors to support young people at points of transition • co-ordinated support for young parents. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing robust arrangements for monitoring the numbers of first-time offenders.

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numbers of care leavers in education, employment and training • use of individual learning plans • developments in the work-related curriculum at key stage 4 • numbers of children with disabilities (families and carers) in receipt of direct payments to support care arrangements. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhancing the 14-19 strategy • reducing the high numbers of young people not in education, employment and training at 16+ • improving opportunities in sixths forms for children seeking entry level or level 1 accreditation.
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Service management

The authority collaborates well with a range of partners to support children’s care, development and progress. Analysis of needs is used effectively to set priorities and challenging targets for improvement. Links with the Primary Care Trust are particularly strong and the authority has developed an excellent relationship with its school improvement contractor to support schools and pupils. The authority knows its strengths and weaknesses well and this is reflected in the quality of its self-assessment.

Good progress has been made in developing a children and young people’s performance plan well ahead of the national timescale. This identifies clear performance targets and supports the integration of children’s services. There is a strong commitment to raising educational standards and the work of the school improvement service is focused and well targeted, within a context of identifying and supporting the needs of individuals and promoting inclusion. However, there is insufficient clarity about the standards young people should achieve by the age of 19, so that currently the effectiveness of inclusion cannot be accurately assessed.

Mechanisms for gathering the views of children and young people are becoming increasingly effective, enabling their contributions to inform the authority’s decision making processes. Support for looked after children has improved significantly and is now at a good level.

Performance management arrangements are steadily improving and for education are mostly good. In social services, there are some good examples of monitoring and evaluation of performance against strategic targets, but there is scope for further development of quality assurance and review mechanisms to be more sharply focused on outcomes relating to children and young people.

Good progress has been made in making the best use of staff expertise. Recruitment and retention issues, for example in some schools and social service areas, are being tackled vigorously.

The council has good capacity to improve further.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy life-styles are promoted for children and young people:

- impact of strategy to reduce teenage pregnancies.

Staying safe

Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:

- issues arising from bullying and harassment linked to racism.

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

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

Looked after children live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- progress with improving the balance between fostering and adoption for looked after children and the use of residential facilities
- development of a private fostering strategy which links with broader strategies on safeguarding and looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- progress towards matching national attainment levels at all key stages
- patterns in the employment of unqualified and temporary teachers in schools.

Making a positive contribution

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

- patterns in the number of first-time offenders.

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:

- numbers of young people not in education, employment and training at 16+ Opportunities for young people seeking other than Level 3 accreditation 16-19
- the proportion of each cohort achieving Level 2 qualifications by age 19 (through education, employment and training).

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: London Borough of Islington

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