

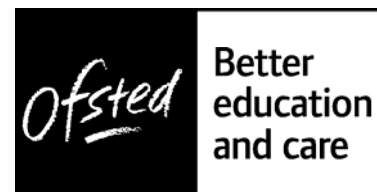
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Making Social Care
Better for People



John Harris
Director of Children, Schools and Families
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Harris

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 5 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, particularly in the way that healthy lifestyles are promoted through partnership between key services. Good preventative work is carried out, for example the effective partnership working and support to reduce teenage pregnancy and promote sexual health. The proportion of schools participating in the national Healthy Schools Standards is high compared with the national average, when including those schools working towards the award. The performance indicator for the health of looked after children showed a steep decline due to the loss of a key specialist post. Although this vacancy has now been filled there remains a need to broaden the responsibility for promoting the health of looked after children to include foster parents and social workers.

Overall the social care indicators in this outcome area are good. There is considerable investment in the childhood and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), promoting the mental health of children and young people. Close collaboration between the CAMHS team and the Youth Offending Team is resulting in prompt referrals of young people. The substance misuse plan for young people is good and is having a positive impact, for example the adolescent drug and alcohol service has commenced prescribing for opiate dependency with positive outcomes.

Staying safe

Outcomes are improving from the short comings identified in 2004 and are now adequate. There have been significant improvements in the child protection system. The register is appropriate and registrations in line with similar authorities. As a result all child protection cases are now allocated to a key worker. A high proportion of the looked after children is educated outside the authority however this proportion is rightly falling. The adoption rate of looked after children under 10, has improved but remains below the England and comparator group average, requiring further improvement, as the authority recognises. However the overall percentage of looked after children adopted has declined. The low number of assessments completed on time remains an area of concern. The percentage of initial assessments completed on time rose but remains significantly below the England and IPF average. The percentage of core assessments done on time fell and is significantly below the England and comparator group average, which rose during the same period.

During inspection, the majority of schools were judged to be good or very good in terms of pupils' care, welfare, health and safety and the very small number of schools with unsatisfactory elements are known to the authority and the situation has been rectified. There are good procedures to address bullying in the authority's policy, which has been adopted by most schools. However the implementation of this policy is variable across schools. The implementation of the authority's good Behaviour and Achievement Strategy is leading to a reduction in exclusions. Continued targeted work with primary schools remains necessary since the rate of exclusion is slightly higher than similar authorities and the national figure. The comparative rate for secondary schools is slightly lower than both the national figure and that of statistical neighbours.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. The overall quality of early years' provision is good and supports children well in enabling them to meet the early learning goals. However, there are fewer very good judgements made on early years' provision than would be expected. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are consistently above national averages and those of statistical neighbours. The authority is not complacent and has correctly identified the need to improve the performance of boys and increase the rate of improvement in writing. The situation is the same at the end of Key Stage 2 with performance consistently above what would be expected in all core subjects but the authority has rightly identified the relative underperformance in mathematics. At the end of Key Stage 3 performance is above national averages and the performance of similar authorities although there is wide variation between schools. At the end of Key Stage 4 more pupils achieve five good GCSE passes than in similar authorities and nationally, however fewer than expected pupils achieve at least one GCSE pass. There is a reducing number of schools with pupils leaving with no qualifications; however, the authority is aware that this number needs to reduce further.

In terms of the value that schools add, from Key Stage 2 to 3 it is above average but from Key Stage 3 to 4 it is average. There is room for improvement at Key Stage 4, given the impressive performance in the other key stages.

Post-16 achievement is lower than at 16. Too many schools offer only limited vocational and alternative curriculum provision, although this issue has been recognised and is being addressed.

In spite of the overall good standards across the authority, the gap between the most and the least successful schools is too great. Too many schools remain below floor targets and a quarter of them are in the bottom quartile of schools nationally for added value from Key Stage 3 to 4. This issue has been identified by the authority and is being addressed with appropriate urgency.

The attainment of the relatively small proportion of minority ethnic groups is generally satisfactory but variable. There is insufficient evidence of improvement over time at Key Stage 4, in the case of some groups, particularly the children of Travellers and Black African and Caribbean pupils where the achievement of boys lags behind that of the girls. The achievement level of looked after children has declined but overall performance is still good.

Attendance at both primary and secondary schools is improving and generally compares favourably with national figures and those for similar authorities. However, the absence rate of looked after children rose and is now above average – an issue which the authority is addressing.

Support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is better in primary than secondary but it is never less than satisfactory and is often good. Schools are being removed from these categories faster than in the past, however more secondary schools than would have been expected have been categorised. A refocusing of the partnership with schools since January 2004 is resulting in earlier and stronger intervention and further improvement is predicted.

There has been stronger than national growth in crèches and out of school care, breakfast clubs and holiday play schemes. There are good recreational and voluntary learning opportunities for children and young people.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. All young people are encouraged to participate through the Youth Forum as well as local and regional events. School councils operate in a significant number of schools. All secondary schools have sixth forms and there are good collaborative arrangements with further education institutions and employers,

consequently participation rates are high and the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is low. The rate of youth crime overall is below national averages. Particularly good work is done with young carers, as a consequence of which the authority has been awarded Beacon status.

The Youth Offending Team is well integrated with mental health services and highly rated by the Youth Justice Board. The restorative justice programme in children's residential care has reduced police referrals by 39%, however final warnings to looked after children has risen and is now above average.

Only 65% of looked after children had pathway plans and not all were allocated a personal advisor, this is being addressed in a review of pathway planning.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good. Support for looked after children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities to make the transition to adult life and economic independence is good.

Overall the provision of 14-19 education and training across the area is satisfactory in meeting the needs of learners, employers and the community. However, access to and participation in vocational, work-based and alternative curriculum offers is unsatisfactory. The authority is aware of this and, working closely with the learning and skills council (LSC) and Connexions, is putting in place a bold and coherent 14-19 strategy to improve the situation. There is a high post-16 participation rate. The proportion of young people progressing to higher education or training is higher than national averages.

SUMMARY

| Strengths | Areas for improvement |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the promotion of healthy life styles for children and young people action to promote children and young people's mental health. | <p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the health needs of looked after children. |
| <p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing all children and young people with a safe environment child protection procedures. | <p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> timely completion of assessments. |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school and to achieve highly • all children and young people can access a range of recreational and voluntary learning provision • children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities are helped to enjoy and achieve. | <p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the value added by some schools, particularly at Key Stage 4 • standards in the lowest performing schools • the absence and attainment of looked after children. |
| <p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making • action is taken to reduce re-offending. | <p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the support for looked after children in respect of the allocation of a personal advisor, pathway plans and final warnings. |
| <p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high post-16 participation rates and average achievement • children and young people with special educational needs and/or learning disabilities are helped to achieve economic well-being. | <p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the provision of 14-19 vocational, work-based and alternative curriculum offers. |

Service management

Since April 2001, when the Children, Schools and Families Service was created, Hertfordshire has had a fully integrated children's service. Excellent senior leadership provides a compelling vision for the future. Well-established, mature partnerships are in place as the authority began collaborative service reviews several years ago. The authority has collaborated very closely with relevant partners in analysing need and setting appropriate, challenging targets for improvement. The views of parents, carers, children and young people have been taken into account in establishing priorities for development. The authority is ahead of the game in implementing the Every Child Matters agenda.

The current Children, Schools and Families Service Plan for 2005/08 is clear, suitably detailed, realistically resourced and securely built on extensive consultation with a range of partners, both statutory and voluntary as well as with schools, parents and carers and young people. The local authority has a detailed and realistic view of its strengths and remaining areas for improvement and despite its many achievements is not complacent. For example data management has been identified as an area for

urgent improvement and action has followed. There is evidence of very good impact, for example in the considerable improvement in the social care recruitment. Progress and actions are very well monitored and evaluated using a framework which sets out key national and local performance indicators.

The council has excellent capacity to improve further.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Looked after children's needs are addressed:

- widen the responsibility for promoting their health.

Staying Safe

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

- timeliness of core assessments
- adoptions of looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school and to achieve highly:

- standards in the worst performing schools
- value added in the quarter of secondary schools adding least value.

Making a positive contribution

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

- the number of looked after children who receive a final warning.

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:

- vocational, work-based and alternative curriculum provision.

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: Hertfordshire County 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. | 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 | 4 |

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| 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 |