

26 November 2007

Mr Alan Wood
Director of Children's Services
London Borough of Hackney
Hackney Technology & Learning Centre
1 Reading Lane
London
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Dear Mr Wood

2007 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY

This letter summarises the findings of the 2007 annual performance assessment for your local authority. The judgements in the letter draw on your review of the Children and Young People's Plan, your action plan arising from the joint area review and the evidence and briefings provided by Ofsted, other inspectorates and relevant bodies. The letter comments on progress since the recent joint area review. We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Hackney Borough Council and The Learning Trust consistently deliver services for children and young people at a good level. There is a clear and coherent vision for the future of children's services in Hackney. Managers have responded effectively to the recommendations raised in the joint area review and good progress has been made. The contribution the council and The Learning Trust make towards improving outcomes for being healthy, enjoying and achieving, and making a positive contribution remains good. There is a good range of universal and targeted services to promote healthy lifestyles. Maternity services provide good midwifery care to vulnerable mothers and the number of teenage pregnancies has fallen. Educational standards remain below the national average. Although children and young people now make good progress, this is from a historically low base, particularly in primary schools.

The council's contribution to improving outcomes with regard to staying safe and achieving economic well-being remains adequate. Work to increase the engagement of children and young people has progressed well and measures to lower the relatively high number of young re-offenders and first time entrants into the justice system are in place. Although their reviews are not consistently timely, the

proportion of children looked after by the council who are in stable placements is above average. Most groups of children and young people in Hackney now have access to forums through which they can make their views known. Prevention services aimed at preventing younger children entering the justice system are being developed but recidivism rates are above average. Strong 16-19 partnerships are developing and exploring ways of extending the range of education and training available in the borough. Effective action has been taken to reduce the number of 16 to 19 year olds not in employment, education or training, although figures are still relatively high.

Being healthy

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. One recommendation for action emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- The council and its partners should develop multi-agency arrangements for assessing the needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for providing co-ordinated services to both them and their parents or carers including arrangements for respite care.

After the joint area review, the council and The Learning Trust responded quickly and effectively to a number of problems with the provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A multi-disciplinary working group has been established to pilot a single point of referral system for disabled children and a scheme is underway to explore how a key worker system can ensure the optimal co-ordination of services for children with complex needs. To improve multi-agency arrangements in this area further, a centre for integrated disabled children's services is being completed and is scheduled to open in 2008.

Parents and carers continue to receive good advice and support. For example, there is a wide range of universal and targeted services to promote healthy lifestyles. Also, maternity services provide good general and specialist midwifery care to vulnerable mothers and there is a productive partnership between the Primary Care Trust and The Learning Trust. As a result, there are fewer mothers smoking than the national average, the percentage of babies with low birth weights is low and the proportion of mothers who breast-feed is higher than the national average. There is clear evidence of effective partnership working within preventative services. The infant mortality rate has been falling steadily and is below the benchmark and similar to the average for England.

Hackney is one of only four areas nationally to have developed a healthy schools programme in the early years. Ofsted's inspections of early years, child care and school settings judged that the majority of settings were satisfactory or better in

enabling children and young people to be healthy. All schools participate in the healthy schools programme and nearly half achieve the status, a proportion similar to the national average. A large majority of 12 to 15 year olds report they have appropriate advice and information on healthy eating.

The number of teenage pregnancies continues to be significantly reduced with the rate of teenage conception falling by 27% from the baseline figure compared with 12% nationally. Coupled with this, the work of the teenage pregnancy partnership has also led to a 21% reduction in the under 16 conception rate, and of 11% in the under 18 abortion rate. The council has responded to poor substance misuse treatment by amalgamating the teams responsible for information and counselling and the recording of case closure. It is too early to judge the impact of this measure.

Support for vulnerable groups, such as children looked after by the council, is good. Some 84% of young people have annual health and dental checks, placing Hackney in the top rank on this measure. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well catered for as can be seen in the response to the joint area review recommendation. Meanwhile, an active parents' group and a transition strategy group optimise the potential for inter-agency collaboration.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have met their target of providing a comprehensive 24-hour facility for all 16-18 year olds. CAMHS officers are aware that provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is less effective and are working with the Primary Care Trust to make improvements. Funding for tier two services has increased and multi-agency services are working well together to ensure early intervention in children's centres, schools and other settings. Waiting times for assessment are good, with all acute cases being seen within timescales and 99% of non-acute cases seen within 26 weeks.

Area for development

- Ensure that CAMHS continue to develop provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Staying safe

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. Six recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For immediate action

- Prepare and implement a clear action plan to address weaknesses in the council's response to referrals to social care services and file management.

- Ensure every opportunity is given for children to be seen alone when assessments of children in need are being undertaken.
- Ensure prompt payment of financial support to care leavers.

For action in the next six months

- The Learning Trust should update its missing children's protocol to identify responsibilities and timescales for taking action at key points.

For action over the longer term

- The council and its partners should establish protocols for sharing information and tracking vulnerable transient children who become known to one of the statutory agencies.
- The council and its partners should reduce the dependency on young carers and increase the range of support they receive.

The council has responded comprehensively to the recommendations made at the time of the joint area review; a recent review by the council's children and young people's scrutiny commission noted the excellent work done to meet targets.

All statutory childcare work is allocated to registered and experienced social workers. Referral and re-referral rates are generally stable and timescales for completion of assessments and child protection conferences have improved. The number of initial assessments and child protection conferences has increased. Referrals which led to initial assessments rose from 72% to 94%. The timeliness of initial assessments has increased to 69.8%, slightly above the national average, and core assessments have increased to 72% which, although slightly below the national average, is acceptable. An action plan to improve the response to referrals to social care services is in place and an audit in July 2006 showed significant improvement.

A local children's safeguarding board has been established and an independent chair appointed. The board is now participating in a wide range of initiatives and activities across the borough ensuring that practice improves and that children are properly safeguarded.

The council has taken steps to improve the timeliness of reviews for children looked after by the council and although there is evidence of some success in an increase from 55% to 70%, the council is aware this needs to continue to improve. Short term placement stability is very good as is long term placement stability. Adoptions of looked after children have improved significantly from 6.1% to 9% which is higher than the national average of 8.3% and takes Hackney into a high performance bracket. However, the percentage of adoptions completed within a year is low.

The joint area review reported that work to provide children and young people with a safe environment was good; this work has continued. Children and young people report feeling safe in the local area, especially at school and in their homes. Effective

anti-bullying strategies in schools, which pupils often help to develop, are having a positive effect; a majority of children and young people report never having been bullied at school. There has been a 59% reduction in the number of children seriously injured or killed in road traffic accidents.

Areas for developments

- Continue to work to improve the timeliness of reviews for children and young people looked after by the council.
- Improve the percentage of adoptions completed within one year.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of The Learning Trust's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. No recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

The year-on-year improvement in educational performance over the last five years has been maintained, and there is evidence of more accelerated improvement over the last year, further closing the gaps with national trends. Although standards in the early years were low compared with national figures in 2006, The Learning Trust has a focused and well-resourced raising achievement plan for the Foundation Stage which includes developing external moderation and further support for assessment processes. Although improving at a faster rate than nationally, attainment in reading and writing at Key Stage 1 is well below national and statistical neighbours. In mathematics, although the results are well below the national average, the gap has been closed and standards are now in line with statistical neighbours. Standards at Key Stage 2 have risen slowly but at a significantly faster rate than the national average. Attainment in English, mathematics and science remains well below the national average and that of statistical neighbours. The proportion of pupils achieving L4+ by the end of Year 6 remains about 10% below the national average. The performance of Caribbean and Turkish/Kurdish pupils was below that of other pupils in 2006, and remains a cause for concern to the Trust. However, more recent data show that the gap is closing and the Trust exceeded its stretch targets for underachieving groups in Key Stages 1 and 3.

Although results were below national averages, in 2006, Hackney was the second most improved local authority in the country overall, the most improved for mathematics in Key Stage 3 and in the top 5% for English and science. This positive trend has been maintained in the most recent results but attainment falls short of the national average. Although broadly matching the average for statistical neighbours, the percentage of students attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C was below national average. However, in 2006, contextual value added to the achievement of Hackney pupils from Key Stage 2 to 4 was 18 points above the

national average; the highest in the country. The proportion of young people leaving school at age 16 without any qualifications is lower than the average for England.

Recent inspections judged the effectiveness of Hackney secondary schools good overall. None has surplus places and the academies programme is having a significant, positive impact on achievement. Two primary schools and one pupil referral unit have a notice to improve and one primary is in special measures; a proportion slightly above average. The Learning Trust acknowledges that it needs to raise the overall effectiveness of primary schools, only half of which are good or better and a high proportion of which achieve below their floor targets, although this figure has halved over the last year. It has identified key areas for improvement in its delivery of support and has rationalised its activities to bring together attention to subjects, underachieving groups and low-performing schools. Resources are more coherently shaped and better targeted than before. Schools are now more directly engaged with raising standards and procedures for assessment and tracking of pupils' progress have improved. These initiatives are beginning to show a significant impact on pupils' achievement in the primary phase.

Behaviour in schools has improved; in 2006/07, most were good or better, and none was judged inadequate. Secondary attendance is getting better and in 2006 was above the national average. Unauthorised absence in secondary schools is in line with the national average. Although overall attendance rates in primary schools have improved over last year, unauthorised absence in primary schools is high at over twice the national average.

Children and young people who are looked after achieve better than nationally. In 2006 18% left care with five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, well above the national average of 12% for looked after children. However, their rate of absence from school is higher than average. In order to co-ordinate this provision more effectively, a headteacher has been appointed to lead a 'virtual school' for looked after children.

Areas for development

- Raising standards and achievement in all phases.
- Lowering the rate of unauthorised absence in primary schools and among children looked after by the council.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the longer term

- Through the work of the young people's participation group, the council and its partners should develop a coherent strategy for feeding back the outcomes of consultations and for the increased participation of groups currently under-represented on consultative and local democratic forums.

Most groups of children and young people in Hackney have access to forums through which they can make their views known. All secondary schools have school councils, a third of which are functioning well and two thirds of which are still developing their ideas and practice. The youth parliament has been revived at a local level and funding has been made available to fund specific projects. The youth board, which comprises young people at risk of offending, contributes to the youth parliament. The disability youth forum helped to secure the final planning agreement for the integrated disabled children's services centre opening in 2008.

Agencies are increasingly working in partnership to engage children and young people in their community. The youth offending team has been restructured, staff ratios have been improved and there has been an increase in the budget. Improved partnership arrangements have been established with youth inclusion, City and Hackney young people's services and Connexions, and some workers from the youth service have been seconded into community and voluntary projects to increase their effectiveness.

Participation rates in statutory reviews for looked after children and young people have improved at twice the rate of statistical neighbours since 2005-06; 81% of young people make a contribution, slightly below the national average of 87%. In measures introduced to raise participation rates, young people are now individually consulted about the review process. However, the council is aware that work in this area needs to continue to improve.

The number of young people re-offending, or entering the youth justice system for the first time, has risen from the 2001 baseline and is above the national average and that of Hackney's statistical neighbours. The council is taking vigorous steps to address this issue. Targeted services aimed at preventing younger children entering the justice system are being developed and contracts drawn up with re-offenders stipulate swifter action should terms be broken. Of the 64 young people referred to the Youth Service Intensive Support Programme (YISP), only three (4.6%) re-offended, which represents a decrease from 10.4% in 2005-06. There has been marked progress in the percentage of young offenders supervised by the youth offending team in suitable full-time education, employment or training since the joint area review; the final 2005-06 figure of 52% rose to 59% in 2006-07 and more recent information shows further improvements. A number of programmes have been established to ensure the target is fully met by the council. A weekly report is made on the young people and this is discussed in team meetings and supervision to ensure all young people's needs are being met.

Areas for development

- Continue to develop prevention services for young re-offenders and first time entrants into the justice system.
- Continue to find ways for children and young people looked after by the council to participate in their reviews which do not impact on their timeliness.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 2

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The contribution of the council's services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. Two recommendations emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- The council and its partners should develop a clear strategy and specific initiatives to reduce the proportion of young people who are not in education and training and the number of young people whose destination is not known.

For action in the longer term

- Develop a coherent 14-19 curriculum offer that provides good progression opportunities including progression into the growth areas for local employment.

A strategy is in place and resources have been carefully targeted at a number of initiatives aimed at reducing the comparatively high number of young people not in employment, education or training. Youth support teams have been expanded and additional funds provided for pupil referral units. In a joint initiative with Connexions, teaching assistants and learning mentors have been employed to 'door knock' during school holidays to track down those whose destinations are unknown. Results are tangible. Although figures in both categories are still above those for East London, the council reached its 2006 target and is confident that it is well placed to meet that for 2010.

The achievement of 16-19 year olds remains below average, particularly in vocational subjects, and The Learning Trust is aware that the performance of sixth forms and the two local colleges, presently adequate, has to be improved.

There are clear structures and action plans for the development of 14-19 provision. Strong consortium arrangements now exist across the borough and a new quality assurance programme involving the Learning and Skills Council and Hackney schools and colleges is in place. There is an improving range of academic and vocational studies for 14-19 year olds both at Level 2 and Level 3 and The Learning Trust has

successfully applied to develop three gateway diplomas. Two new sixth forms have opened and more are planned. A vocational subjects consultant appointed by The Learning Trust is supporting schools. The work-based learning offer needs to be further expanded in range and quality, especially those aspects with the potential for development through progression options linked to diplomas.

Better co-ordination between services has yet to ensure 14-19 year olds receive appropriate guidance about employment, education and training; the number of young people saying that they are unaware of education and training opportunities is higher than average.

The growth of childminder, out-of-school and crèche provision is well above the national average, resulting in a significant rise in childcare places. The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation is slightly above the national figure and the proportion of care leavers in employment, education or training is higher than average.

Areas for development

- Continue to reduce the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training, and whose destinations are not known.
- Improve the range and quality of the vocational and work-based learning offer.
- Ensure 14-19 year olds receive appropriate guidance about employment, education and training.

Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people

Grade 3

Summary of strengths and areas for development

The council's and The Learning Trust's capacity to improve their services for children and young people is good, and their management of these services is effective. One recommendation emerged from the joint area review.

For action in the next six months

- Ensure a consistent and coherent performance management system is in place across all services.

Since the joint area review, the council and The Learning Trust have made significant advances on the recommended actions across all outcomes. Immediate points relating to the safety of children and young people were rapidly dealt with and other issues are providing a clear focus for continuing attention.

The council and The Learning Trust have a good record of identifying and responding to areas in need of improvement, but need to accelerate the pace of change in some

areas. The self-assessment is accurate and realistic and able leadership means the management team is clearly focused on the areas most in need of improvement. Performance data is used well and the Children and Young People's Plan is coherent and fit for purpose. Following the review, and a thorough internal needs assessment, a comprehensive set of performance indicators for the Children and Young People's Plan has been developed and implemented.

The proportion of operational staff working for children's services has fallen slightly but remains above the national average. Among social workers, the percentage of vacant posts has fallen slightly, and although the proportion of full-time teacher vacancies is well below Hackney's statistical neighbours, it rose above the national average in 2006. Post-16 partnerships have identified workforce reform with specific regard to vocational programmes as part of their work plans and proposals now in consultation about the structure of children's services include the creation of new posts.

Guided by a clear vision and strong sense of direction, The Learning Trust has continued to establish multi-disciplinary teams; partnership arrangements, such as those developing the 16-19 curriculum, are strong and developing. The commitment of the two new academies to the Trust's educational improvement strategy is a good indicator of the confidence the wider educational community has in its capacity to effect further improvements. Since the review, initiatives like the establishment of the new safeguarding board and the integration of disabled children's services, have contributed to the clarity and co-ordination of children's social care, which are much improved.

The total personal social services budget per capita has fallen slightly although it is still well above the national average. Expenditure has risen on services to children, family support services and the adoption service. Although the percentage of residential childcare workers who have achieved the Level 3 NVQ is above the national average, overall the percentage of the budget spent on training is low; the proportion of social workers and residential managers who need to and have obtained the PQ1 award remains below average.

Efforts to raise standards in schools have been extensive, carefully targeted and determined and the rate of improvement across all Key Stages has been above the national figure, albeit from a historically low base. However, The Learning Trust is well aware that although the gap is narrowing, standards remain well below national averages.

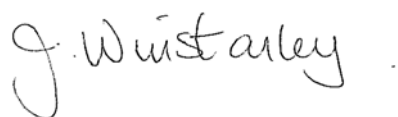
Area for development

- Sustain the pace of improvement in educational standards and accelerate it in post-16 provision and participation, and in the aspects of children and young people's social care indicated above.

Overall, the council and The Learning Trust have demonstrated good progress in meeting the joint area review recommendations, and have shown good capacity to maintain and improve further their services for children and young people.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection