

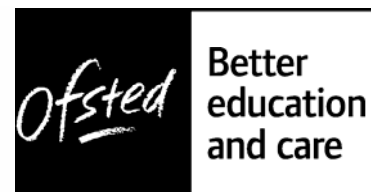
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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mrs M Atkinson
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1 December 2005

Dear Mrs Atkinson

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE
SERVICES 2005**

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 4 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and children's 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 very good, with some very significant strengths. This is reflected in the council's recent achievement of Beacon status for Healthy Communities and the concerted effort by services to meet the council's and Community Plan priorities. All schools have the Healthy Schools Award, some having held it for many years, and effective practice in health education is identified and disseminated by the Raising Achievement Service. The delivery of drugs, alcohol and safe-sex programmes is effectively coordinated and well supported by advisory staff and a large team of trained, school-based teachers. School inspections judge pupils' participation in sport as satisfactory or better and very good in primary and special schools. All schools comply with statutory requirements for sex and relationship education.

Actions to promote the mental health of children and young people are also very effective. The Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is a well developed multi-agency service that is effectively supported by the council and which provides timely support for vulnerable young people. A dedicated health team for looked after children is successful in assuring their good health. The incidence of teenage pregnancy declined significantly in the first three years of the local authority's strategy and at a faster rate than nationally. The conception rate of girls under 18 has

increased over the last two years and, although this is a regional trend, the council recognises the challenge this presents in meeting its future targets.

Staying safe

Overall, this is another strong area of performance and outcomes are generally very good. Children and young people are provided with the safe environment to which they are entitled. Looked after children enjoy very good levels of stability in their placements and all these children, and those on the child protection register, have an allocated qualified social worker. Each looked after child is visited by a member of the children's rights service within three weeks of a care episode beginning. The proportion of looked after children in foster and adoption placements is high and very low numbers are placed with parents or fostered with family and friends. However, a relatively large number of those children are placed outside of the borough. The council recognises the need to keep children within the borough and is pursuing an appropriate strategy to achieve this relative to the needs of each child.

The child protection system is well managed and is a priority for the relevant agencies, who work together well. The authority has clear referral systems; families and children at risk are identified early and the quality of preventative support is good. All child protection reviews are held on time. There has been an impressive rise in the proportion of initial and core assessments completed within the timescales and the number of repeat referrals is low. Schools are well advised and supported in their safeguarding roles. All schools are involved in anti-bullying programmes and inspections judge procedures as satisfactory or better in all schools, and good to very good in primary and special schools. Recently updated guidelines on reporting racial harassment have led to an increase in the number of reported incidents. Sure Start and children's centres have a clear prevention role, intervening early to support families and carers, and the extended schools strategy is well integrated with these initiatives. The Area Child Protection Committee has been very effective and will be superseded by a Local Safeguarding Children Board by September 2005, well ahead of the national timescales.

There was a significant increase in the number of re-registrations to the child protection register last year but the council understands the reason for this rise and the Area Child Protection Committee is considering appropriate action. Whilst the proportion of children from black and minority ethnic groups amongst those looked after and on the protection register is low, these children are significantly over-represented on the children in need register in comparison with their numbers in the population. The actual numbers are very small but the local authority accepts the need for further exploration of this apparent anomaly.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are predominantly very good, reflecting the council's strong drive to ensure that all children and young people achieve as well as they can. In almost all respects there has been a marked improvement in the outcomes for children and young people. Overall performance now compares favourably with the best-performing local authorities nationally and, in terms of attainment, is consistently above statistical neighbours.

There is extensive and high quality early years provision which is increasingly well linked to the developments in Sure Start, children's centres and extended schools, and Children's Fund programmes. The number of early years and childcare places has grown and this provision is meeting the needs of children and families well. There has also been substantial and sustained progress in raising the attainment of children in mainstream education, with particularly impressive improvements in performance at Key Stage 2 and in the number of young people gaining five or more A* to C general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades. The progress that children and young people make is at least in line with that nationally and, up to age 16, improves as they move through their education.

The local authority provides good services to schools and is generally very effective in ensuring good quality education. Services have strong relationships with schools and participate well in partnership working with schools and other agencies. Better intelligence and robust monitoring, support and challenge have resulted in reducing the number of schools causing concern. None are in special measures. There is now a very high proportion of very good or good schools, increasingly working in partnership with services to develop their capacity and promote good practice.

Schools are particularly strong in their ethos and in their efforts to help children and young people to participate fully, and to achieve. Attendance rates are up and rates of permanent and fixed term exclusions down. Both are now in line with the national average in primary schools, though permanent exclusions remain above average in the secondary phase. The attendance of looked after children has improved significantly and is now good. Good partnership working within education services, with social care services, the Youth Offending Team and the voluntary sector has contributed to raising standards for many vulnerable pupils and to developing the capacity of schools to keep them engaged in education. All children and young people educated other than at school have access to full-time equivalent education and to good quality provision. Rates of reintegration into mainstream education are much higher than found nationally. There is a very strong emphasis on broadening the curriculum and using culture and creativity to enhance pupils' enjoyment and achievement, and there are improved opportunities for recreational activities in schools.

The achievement of looked after children, however, presents a more mixed picture. The Raising Educational Achievement of Looked After Children team is an indication of the commitment by elected members to their corporate parenting role. The proportion of these children sitting one or more GCSEs is high, but there is a significant reduction projected for 2005 in the number leaving care aged 16 or over with one GCSE A* to G. The proportion leaving care at 16 or over with five or more GCSEs A* to C increased this year, but still remains well below the national average. The proportion of looked after children with a personal education plan is 82%, an improvement from the previous year, but remains below the target of 90%.

The local authority is fully aware of the need to improve some aspects of educational performance; for example, in the lower than average proportion of pupils achieving five or more A* to C in English and mathematics, in the attainment of boys relative to girls, and attainment in General Certificate of Education (GCE) A-Level and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) post-16. It also recognises the need to address surplus school places, particularly in the primary sector, and to further improve the pace of established developments in issuing statements of special educational need to all children and young people within the required timescales, and in educating more children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. There are convincing strategies to address these areas, but efforts to raise the attainment of young people leaving care at 16 are not linked to sufficiently clear targets for improvement over time, or to strategies for monitoring the impact of support services.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are generally very good. Children and young people are given effective and, in many respects, very good support in managing changes in their lives. There is also a clear commitment to listening to and acting on children's and young people's views, and enabling them to participate in decision making, for example on Children's Fund projects. Virtually all schools have a schools council, linked to the council's Youth Assembly, and all secondary special schools are represented on that assembly, as are several organisations for specific groups of young people. There is a specific forum for looked after children, the One Voice Youth Network, and currently the Youth Assembly is chaired by a looked after young person.

For the most part, there are good procedures in place to help children and young people with learning difficulties or disabilities, and those in care, to manage the transition between specific phases of their lives. The participation of young people in their looked after reviews has improved significantly, and is well supported by Independent Reviewing Officers. The Children's Fund transition project, the Behaviour Improvement Project and learning mentors are all having a positive impact on tackling the disaffection of many of the most vulnerable children and young people and in supporting them at key points of transition between schools and alternative education or care. The Youth Offending Team is recognised nationally as a very high performing

service. Its Amber project successfully focuses on early identification of youngsters engaging in anti-social behaviour, and the reduction in first time and repeat offenders has exceeded national targets this year. The number of final warnings and convictions of looked after children have continued to fall.

Achieving economic well-being

On balance, outcomes in this area are generally good, though there are areas for further improvement, particularly in aspects of the support for children and young people with learning difficulties or disabilities in making the transition to adult life and economic independence. Overall, the quality of education for 14 to 19 year-olds is good; it is planned collaboratively on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of need, and partnership working with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is good. The Gateshead 14 to 19 teaching and learning initiative and the central Gateshead sixth form have both been highlighted nationally as exemplars of good practice and collaborative activity. Strong inter-service and inter-agency working is improving the range of opportunities for young people to remain in education and training. Sure Start is running successful local programmes, assisting parents to take part in education and to maximise their income.

The authority has exceeded targets for the progression of young people to employment, and there have been improvements in the participation of 16 and 17 year-olds in further education and in the percentage of pupils not achieving GCSE passes. Progression mentors provide good support for those youngsters at risk of dropping out of education, employment and training. Looked after children are also very well supported in this transition. Funding arrangements have been agreed with Gateshead College to support care leavers attending the college.

Nevertheless, participation rates are still below the national average and the authority acknowledges the need to improve the attainment of young people over the age of 16 across the borough, including the average points score at A level, and the proportion of young adults achieving National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 or equivalent. There are convincing strategies in place to achieve this, based on strong partnership arrangements in the 14 to 19 teaching and learning initiative and proven strategies for identifying and targeting support. There remains a need to ensure that pathway planning is improved and linked to more robust transitions arrangements. No young people currently have a person-centred plan and there is very low take up of direct payments among children with disabilities. A coordinator has been appointed and a small group of young people with disabilities are now piloting this approach, but specific actions to improve transition arrangements and direct payments are not clearly articulated in the current action plans for Children's Services.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the promotion of healthy lifestyles, and the mental health of children and young people. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing children and young people with a safe environment child protection procedures and the collaboration of services to safeguard children and young people support for looked after children and those with learning disabilities or difficulties. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the quality of early years provision support to enable children and young people to attend and enjoy school and to achieve the quality of provision for those who do not attend school improvements in attainment, particularly at Key Stages 2 and 4. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> differences in performance between boys and girls and the proportion of young people gaining GCSE in English and mathematics the proportion of young people leaving care aged 16 or over achieving five or more A* to C GCSEs the proportion of all statements of special educational need issued within required timescales reduction in surplus places in schools.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> support to children and young people to respond to and manage changes in their lives the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect their lives. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p>

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaboration with the local LSC and other partners in delivering post-16 education and training • the range and good quality of 14 to 19 provision. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raising the attainment young people post-16 and increasing their participation of in education, employment and training • support to children and young people who are looked after or with learning disabilities or difficulties in their transition to adult services.

Service management

Services are well managed and have a good track record of performance and improvement. Gateshead has already taken action to establish Children’s Services. There is strong evidence of education and children’s social care services working effectively together, in many cases impressively so, and of the impact of this work on outcomes for children and young people.

The authority is ambitious and its services have a strong track record of entrepreneurial initiatives and involvement in cutting edge projects to deliver its vision. It was, for example, designated as a Children’s Trust Pilot and is also a pilot for Local Area Agreements. Its ambition, however, is tempered with pragmatism: the council will pursue pilot, trailblazer or pathfinder status only where it can attract funding to contribute to what it sees as its core business. This prioritisation is reflected in coherent planning. The Community Strategy clearly sets out the priorities of the local Strategic Partnership and these priorities are reflected in the interim Children and Young People’s Plan. This has been produced this year despite the fact that, as an ‘excellent’ council, the authority was not required to do so.

The authority’s self-assessment demonstrates that, on the whole, it knows itself very well and is very clear about its strengths and the great majority of the areas for further development. There are convincing strategies to address most of these areas. Resource management is sound; allocation is clearly linked to the council’s priorities, and both its capital strategy and asset management plans have been judged as excellent by the Audit Commission. Gross expenditure on children and families is in line with national trends although there was a significant increase in the last financial year to support the development of Children’s Services. There is a strong performance management culture in the council incorporating staff appraisal and personal objectives to service planning and corporate priorities.

The Pathfinder Children’s Trust is inter-agency at both strategic and operational levels. The formal Children and Young People Strategic Partnership is due to be launched in

summer 2005. A Director of Children's Services has already been appointed, supported by a strong and experienced management team which provides valuable continuity. There is a stable staff base with low turnover and low vacancy rates, presenting no obvious risks to service delivery or development. Though newly formed, Children's Services are operating within the authority's proven approach to managed transition of its services, and there is a well-planned and clear direction of travel from the Pathfinder Children's Trust to fully integrated Children's Services. New models of working are already being tested, including co-location of services, and a commissioning strategy is being developed. The council has excellent capacity to improve further.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review:

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- action taken to further improve inter-agency working to produce statements of special educational need within statutory timescales.

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

Early years provision promotes children's development and well-being and helps them meet early learning goals:

- the pace of reduction in surplus places in schools within the children's centre and extended schools strategies in order to meet the 2010 targets.

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:

- action taken to increase post-16 participation rates in education, employment and training; to improve the attainment of young people post-16 across the borough; and to increase the proportion of young adults achieving NVQ Level 2.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to achieve economic well-being:

- action taken to further improve the continuity of care and procedures for transition of young people with learning disabilities and/or difficulties to adult services
- progress in ensuring that pathway planning is improved and young people have a Person Centred Plan, and in increasing the very low take up of direct payments among children with disabilities.

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: Gateshead Metropolitan Borough 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	3
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	4

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