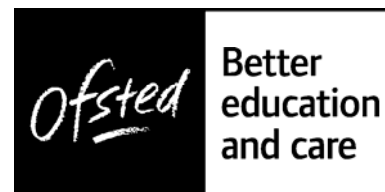


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456-404045
edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Steve Pitt
Director of Social Care and Health
Dorset County Council

Mr Stephen Prewett
Director of Education
Dorset County Council

Ms Jackie Last
Head of Children's Services
Dorset County Council

1 December 2005

Dear Colleagues

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 29 June 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 you and your colleagues made available to discuss relevant issues.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are good and there is some evidence that healthy lifestyles are promoted through services working together, such as the CAMHS and the Youth Offending Team. Primary Care Trusts have employed nurses for looked after children and health checks are complete for nearly three quarters of these children. Targets for increasing the number of schools involved in the 'healthy schools' programme have been met for the last three years, including for all the schools with over 20% of pupils eligible for free school meals. Section 10 inspections of schools by Ofsted, conducted in 2003/04, indicate generally positive outcomes in this area.

Teenage pregnancy rates have not declined overall, except in Weymouth and Portland where there has been some success. There is a need to strengthen the skills and knowledge of front-line staff to promote children and young people's mental health. Specialist CAMH services are good in the east of the county, but access is less good in the west, raising a question about equitable access.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good. A safe environment is provided for children and young people. Child protection procedures are sound. The authority is in the top performance band for the length of time children are on the Child Protection Register, reregistrations

and reviews. Social workers are assigned to all children and young people on the child protection register and to all looked after children. All children at risk have an agreed multi-agency protection plan which is monitored through child protection conferences. Managers' audit of 15% of all case files annually is a positive feature of work in this area. The Area Child Protection Committee co-ordinates activity and social services and the special educational needs team meet regularly. Children Act inspections of childcare are positive and virtually all the schools inspected in the last year complied with child protection procedures.

The stability of placements for looked after children is very good. The 'Turnaround' special foster care service for young people at risk is good.

A high level of unallocated work in children in need cases was reported to County Councillors in January 2005, leading to a potential delay in responding to referrals. However, the authority put clear measures in place to assess regularly their urgency and risk and appropriate priority is now given to responses.

The proportion of initial assessments undertaken within seven days has improved slightly, but is still lower than the comparator and national average. The proportion undertaken within 35 days has improved, but still remains below the comparator and national average. Just over a half of looked after children are placed for adoption within twelve months of the 'best interest' decision. This is a marked decrease since last year, below the national rate of that for similar authorities. Adoptions of looked after children are similarly very low. However, it is acknowledged that the numbers of children involved are small and this can lead to variation from year to year.

Only one in four eligible care leavers has a pathway plan for preparation for adulthood and less than half of children with disabilities at 14 have a transition plan. The authority recognises that more work is required to strengthen such arrangements.

Children from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities are over represented in the children in need population but not in the looked after children group. The inspection of fostering services in March 2005 concluded that the authority needs to consider how it can better meet the needs of black and minority ethnic children. It should be noted that, across the South West, BME children are overrepresented in the looked after children group.

In two of the five secondary schools inspected in 2003/04, pupils' freedom from bullying, racism and other forms of harassment was judged to be no better than satisfactory. Judgements on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development were similar. Further, Ofsted's inspection of the LEA in May 2004 found that its support for behaviour in schools was unsatisfactory and poorly regarded by them. The authority has recently put in place a strategy for behaviour, emotional and social development (BESD) which was in draft form at the time of this annual assessment. It includes clear

objectives to improve early intervention strategies, build capacity, extend partnerships and improve monitoring and evaluation of the impact of such support, but it is too early to judge its impact.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. The overall quality of early years provision is good and supports children well to meet the early learning goals.

Standards at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 are good and above those of similar authorities in, for example, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and English at Key Stage 2. Pupils' progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 over the last two years has been good. Standards at Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science are above the national average and comparable with those of similar authorities. Pupils make good progress from Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 3, but from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 their progress is below the national average, and it has slowed from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4. The education development plan shows careful attention to the details of pupils' achievement.

The proportion of pupils gaining good GCSE results (A*-C) is above the national average and in line with that of similar authorities, although there has been no further improvement for the last three years. Through its monitoring, the authority is aware of the reasons for this standstill and is acting appropriately to improve pupils' achievements in science, modern foreign languages and information and communication technology.

Attendance rates are improving. Unauthorised absences in secondary schools are below the national average, as are exclusions, and also below those of similar authorities. The authority does not monitor exclusions by minority ethnic group, but is aware of how many looked after children are in this category.

Since 1993 and 1994, the proportion of schools judged to be requiring special measure or having serious weaknesses is lower than that for similar authorities and nationally. Leadership and management were judged to be at least good in virtually all the schools inspected by Ofsted during 2003/04 and, currently, only a very small number of them are in Ofsted's 'cause for concern' categories.

The youth service offers provision for young people from across 60 locations. Increasing numbers of young people are achieving externally accredited awards, although the service acknowledges the need to expand the range and availability of such opportunities.

The inspection of fostering services in March 2005 indicated that systems are in place to support the educational needs of looked after children. Inspections of children's

homes indicate that staff work hard to secure suitable educational provision for each young person and, in more than one home, the young people told inspectors that they were supported to fulfil their academic potential. A DfES survey earlier this year showed that a very high proportion of the authority's children in need said they had choice about their care. This was the best performance in the south west region.

Although the proportion of looked after children gaining one or more GCSEs is higher than that for similar authorities and nationally, the proportion gaining five good GCSEs (A*-C) is very low and has fallen considerably since last year. In 2004, one out of three looked after children did not take any GCSE examinations. The figure is in line with that for similar authorities and nationally and the authority knows the reasons in the case of each child. Nevertheless, the figure is still a concern. Further work is required to engage a number of young people in education. Further, only four out of five looked after children of school age have a personal education plan.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. The majority of children and young people are given good support to manage change in their lives. Inspections of Early Years provision show positive outcomes for young children in this area. The authority has a number of separate approaches in different areas of its work, but there is little evidence of an overall strategy to gather, more systematically, the views of children and young people.

The Dorset Youth Service is good, with strengths clearly outweighing any weaknesses. Inspection shows that young people participate in a wide range of activities and decision making. They are also involved in planning and evaluating youth work programmes. However, this is not yet firmly established. There is a good level of participation by looked after children in their own reviews. In addition, young people have been involved in leading 'Total respect' training and in appointing managers and staff in youth and social services.

The performance of the authority's youth offending team (YOT) is consistently within the top quarter of all YOTs nationally. The rate of offending amongst looked after children is very high compared with the rest of the South West region and similar authorities. In this context, Dorset has the worst performance in the region. This cannot be accounted for by a very low offending rate amongst the general population of young people population, since the aim should be to reduce the gap between offending by looked after children and the population more generally.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good. The inspection report on the LEA referred to an 'ambitious strategy' for the 14-19 phase which focused on the needs of learners and which was aligned well with the LEA's overall strategy for school improvement.

Partnership with colleges has improved opportunities for increased flexibility at Key Stage 4, as well as additional vocational provision for post-16 students. There is collaborative use of LSC funding with Poole and Bournemouth LEAs and a protocol agreed for the exchange of data between the LSC and schools.

Average point scores for post-16 qualifications are in line with those nationally and for similar authorities, although this indicates a falling off in performance from that achieved at Key Stages 1 to 3. The authority is aware of this, has analysed post-16 performance and has set up groups to tackle three key issues, alongside work by the local LSC on comparative data.

The proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training is high and has been steadily rising each year. However, a large number of care leavers are not allocated a support worker; this is a weakness. The inspection of foster care found that, because of staffing difficulties in the leaving care service, priority was given to young people approaching 18 or who had already left care, with the result that some young people did not have sufficient or timely access to planning and advice during this crucial phase. Access to suitable accommodation for care leavers is also a problem.

The numbers of children with disabilities receiving a service is very good and reflects steady performance year on year. However, a very low proportion of their carers, as well as young adults with disabilities, receive direct payments.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> health checks for looked after children generally positive picture from school inspections in 03/04 for this area the healthy schools programme. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reducing the rate of teenage pregnancy strengthening the skills and knowledge of front line staff in providing for children and young people's mental health.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stability of placements for looked after children allocation of social workers for all looked after children and those on child protection register (CPR) children on CPR for appropriate time all reviews undertaken of children on the CPR. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adoptions of looked after children and speed of placement for adoption after best interest decision pathway planning for care-leavers the timeliness of assessments.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> standards achieved at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 attendance and exclusion rates proportion of looked after children gaining one or more GCSEs. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCSE performance proportion of looked after children attaining five or more good GCSEs (A*-C).
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> good Early Years outcomes participation of looked after children in their reviews Total Respect training for staff by young people and involvement of young people in staff appointments. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> offending rates by looked after children support for strategies to deal with behaviour in secondary schools, including bullying, racism and other forms of harassment.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> proportion of care leavers in education, training or employment proportion of children with disabilities receiving services 14-19 work including partnerships. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> transition planning for disabled children and looked after children as they approach adulthood educational performance post-16.

Service management

The authority has drawn together the views of relevant partners in analysing its needs, although only limited account has been taken of the views of children, young people, carers and parents. Dorset has a small minority ethnic population which is underrepresented in the authority's plans.

Education and social services are not generously funded, but have sound financial management and offer good value for money.

A large number of plans are in place, including a draft of the authority's new Strategy for Children and Young People (2005/06), but these do not provide a sufficiently convincing vision. Individual plans are generally clear about their aims and proposed outcomes, but, taken as a whole, they lack coherence as component parts of an overall strategy. It is clear that senior managers within the authority are firmly committed to taking forward the agenda of *Every Child Matters*, but there is little evidence that this positive stance influences the authority's overall planning and working patterns. The authority recognises it has further work to do to ensure staff at all levels understand the intentions of *Every Child Matters* as well as the need for, and benefits of, improved partnerships.

A wide range of partnerships is in place, and some of these are effective. Other partnerships, for example with district councils including leisure services, are underdeveloped. The authority is aware that much more work is needed, for example with the voluntary sector. The recently agreed LAA agreement may support this. Partnership between the education and social services directorates is underdeveloped. There is still some way to go in drawing these services together to benefit children and young people. Currently, they work as two separate directorates with, for example, almost no shared funding arrangements. The post of Director of Children's Services was advertised shortly before this assessment took place, with a view to the post being fully operational by April 2006. At this stage, however, there is limited evidence that joint working and a single culture are being established. The challenge for the new post holder will be to pull together the council's services and planning for children.

The council's capacity to improve further is adequate.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Action is taken to promote children and young people's mental health:

- the consistency of access to CAMHS across the authority.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

- timeliness of assessments.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- personal education plans and arrangements for education for school-age looked after children.

Making a positive contribution

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

- the offending pattern by looked after children.

Achieving economic well-being

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

- transition planning for disabled children.

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: Dorset 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	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	2

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