

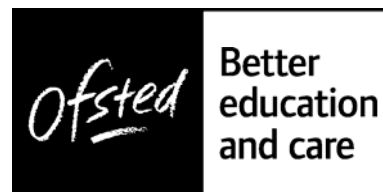
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045

email: edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Mark Hodson
Strategic Director, Neighbourhoods, Communities & Children's Services
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
The Council House
PO Box 251, College Road
Doncaster DN1 3DA

1 December 2005

Dear Mr Hodson

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 25 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. The Local Area Agreement contains specific targets in relation to health and provides a clear focus for partnership work. Progress has been made to establish a range of services to promote health and well-being, which includes the healthy schools initiative, the youth service focusing on active pursuits and healthy eating, sexual health services and a drug action team. A comprehensive needs analysis has been used to highlight areas of need and to target work, and measures are being taken to understand the health issues further.

There is a good range of services for looked after children, with a significantly improved and good performance on the health indicator. Regulatory inspection reports point to active promotion of health and well-being with evidence of work on healthy eating and other health issues and of specialist medical services being sought when needed. Medication systems in the children's homes are generally satisfactory. The report on the fostering service indicates that health needs are being met and a training package on different aspects of health is available to carers. There is a looked after children nurse and health plans are being implemented.

There is a multi-agency approach to teenage pregnancy, but the incidence rate for those aged under 18 remains above national averages. The council reported, however, an

overall reduction from the 1998 baseline. There is a wide range of effective mental health services for young people with a good performance on timely response to acute and non-acute referrals and plans in place to develop the service further for children and young people with learning difficulties. Mental health services for looked after children include therapeutic intervention, established with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Support for staff working with looked after children is provided by the primary mental health service.

Staying safe

Overall outcomes in this area are good. Regulatory inspection reports state that, in the main, looked after children are provided with a safe environment, investment has occurred in the residential units, appropriate checks are made on staff and effective anti-bullying policies are in place. There has been an increase in the rates of looked after children since last year, but this remains in line with comparators and the general trend over time is a reduction. There is a good level of transition planning for children with a disability, with new or improved services developed in year. All schools inspected had child protection procedures in place.

Child protection indicators are generally good. Numbers on the child protection register are lower than comparators and registrations have reduced. This has been achieved without a high rate of re-referrals or re-registrations. All child protection cases are allocated to a social worker. Although the indicator for child protection reviews shows a decline, it remains good. Performance on timely completion of initial and core assessments has improved since last year, but the latter remain an area where further improvements are needed.

Doncaster met a local public service stretch target for adoption, and successfully increased the numbers of children adopted in the year in comparison with the previous year.

Doncaster has a preventative strategy and a good range of preventative services, for example, Sure Start, Family Centres and Children's centres.

There are a range of appropriate systems in place to promote the safety of looked after children, including an independent visitors service, children's rights officers and a looked after child who is a modern apprentice working in the children's rights team. Regulatory inspection reports confirm that all children's homes have child protection policies which staff had received training in. Children and young people know how to complain and complaints are on the whole dealt with appropriately. All homes have missing person's procedures and regulatory inspection reports raise no concerns about the level of missing persons. There has been an improved performance on timely reviews (95%), and a good performance on social work allocation that is higher than comparators.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory, but many aspects require continuing, sustained improvement. The council recognises that there is still more to be done to improve the performance of education services. Whilst many of the outcomes for children and young people still remain too low, there is evidence of significant and steady improvement in the scope and quality of education provision.

The range of childcare provision has expanded at well beyond the national rate and its quality is satisfactory overall. However, the quality of nursery provision is significantly below that found elsewhere. A well established council early years' service and inter-agency Early Years Development and Childcare (EYDC) partnership support developments and carefully monitor the tensions between expansion and the maintenance of quality. The EYDC sustainability officer plays an important role in this.

The council is developing a sharper approach to monitoring, challenge, intervention and support. It has acted to provide leadership on important cultural issues related to attendance and achievement in education. For example, the rate of authorised absence from schools has been declining as new standards and expectations of attendance are adopted by schools and parents. Improving attendance is a high priority and good progress is being made. Further improvement is needed. In secondary schools, whilst the level of authorised absence is declining and is now in line with comparators, unauthorised absence remains consistently high and has increased over the last three years. Whilst the rate of permanent exclusions from secondary schools has fallen, it remains higher than in similar authorities.

The progress made by children and young people and their attainment at different levels of education remain low. At the end of Key Stage, 1 pupils perform broadly in line with similar authorities. However, value added between all key stages is below national levels. In 2003/04 targets for improvement were not met at most levels. At Key Stage 2, girls perform particularly poorly. At Key Stage 3, around 26% of schools are performing below national minimum targets. Performance overall was well below the local targets in the three core subjects. At general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) the proportion of young people who achieve five A* to C was below levels in similar areas in 2003 and 2004. The gap with similar areas has grown year on year. The proportion of young people gaining one A* to G is also below those in similar areas.

The proportion of schools in Ofsted categories has been in line with those nationally since 1993. There are currently 2 secondary schools in special measures out of 17, and 1 primary school. Overall, this is an improved picture from the previous year. The proportion of schools causing concern is in line with similar authorities, but a higher proportion of these schools are in special measures compared with elsewhere. The overall effectiveness of primary schools has been below national levels but this is now improving.

The attendance of looked after children at school has been consistently poor at around double the level of absence found nationally. Whilst there was some improvement in 2004/05 the levels of absence remain higher than nationally. The attainment of looked after children is around the national average. Doncaster has a looked after children attainment strategy which includes specific training for teachers, tracking attainment, summer schools and individualised support and coaching for young people. This has contributed to recent improvements. The level of exclusion of pupils with special educational needs is high and is at a level around double that of similar authorities. A Mayoral White paper has proposed a major restructuring of special school provision. A wide range of out-of-school activities are provided for children with disabilities. The proportion of supervised juveniles in education, employment or training is below the national targets and in line with other areas.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good overall. A wide range of youth crime initiatives are in place, including a newly established Youth Inclusion Support Service. The most recent data available show a reduction in the rate of youth re-offending which remains, however, higher than the national rate. The number of first time offenders in the youth offending system has fallen substantially over the last five years, but has not been declining as fast as national rates over the last year. The youth offending strategy now encompasses work with those young people known to be at high risk of offending.

The council has adopted a wide range of measures to involve young people in contributing their views on issues and services which affect their lives. They are focused on a successful youth council. The measures include a consultation fun day through which young people's concerns and priorities were collected to help development of the borough plan; a Mayor's advisory panel; a rights action forum for looked after children; and the appointment of a children's rights officer, with a Children's Rights modern apprentice. Hear By Rights standards have been adopted by the youth service and will be formally launched by the Mayor in his Green Paper for children and young people. The self-assessment recognises that more work is needed to collect and evaluate information on the extent of children and young people's involvement in shaping services, and providing feedback on the impact this has had. A series of surveys is planned from the autumn to obtain children's views on a broad range of issues to inform strategic planning by the council and its partners.

Looked after children are involved in reviewing provision and planning their own development. There has been a good performance on the percentage of looked after children communicating their views to a review which is above comparators and regulatory inspection reports confirm a range of measures are in place to enable the young people to have a voice. A communication and consultation group has been established since 2003 and has involved children with special educational needs or disabilities well in a range of activities to improve services.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. Good support is provided through a multi-agency approach for looked after children leaving care. This includes ongoing help through Barnados, personal advisers in Connexions, the teenagers-to-work initiative and a range of earmarked accommodation. However, the proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training at the age of 19 remains low despite some improvement. The extent of direct payments to children with disabilities is low. Good progress has been made in evaluating what improvements are needed to meet the needs of all Doncaster's 14 to 19 year olds in education and training. As part of the Doncaster Education City initiative, a curriculum audit has been completed, six Area Planning Groups have been established, and the Mayor's 14 to 19 strategy is now being formally completed. The council has recognised that important strategic decisions about how 16 to 19 education will be organised remain to be made. It is working closely with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and other partners to draw up options and plans for improvement. The full impact of many recent 14 to 19 developments cannot yet be evaluated. Much work is already underway or planned to deal with priority issues. These include a statement of entitlement for all Doncaster's 14 to 19 year olds; the relationships between school sixth forms and with other post-16 providers including the college; and the need to extend the availability of impartial information, advice and guidance.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensive range of inter-agency work underway to promote healthy living, reduce drug use and reduce obesity • needs analysis used well to highlight priorities and to target work • significant improvement in health assessments for looked after children and good involvement of nurses offering advice and training for carers • good performance on acute and non-acute referrals for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Youth Offending Team. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuing high rates of teenage pregnancy.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is a good performance on child protection • a very wide range of preventative services such as Sure Start, Family and Children’s Centres • good development of policies and specialist posts designed to ensure children’s safety • met a target on adoptions to increase numbers of adoptions of looked after children. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the timeliness of core assessments needs to improve further.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the high rate of expansion of childcare provision • substantial improvements in attendance rates at school • good progress in setting more appropriate standards for unauthorised absence • reduction in the number of schools in Ofsted categories. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of nursery provision • the level of authorised absence in primary schools, and unauthorised absence in secondary schools • the high level of exclusions from secondary schools • the value added between Key Stages 1 and 4, especially poor value added Key Stages 3 to 4. • high levels of absence of looked after children from school • the low proportion of supervised juveniles in education, employment or training.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wide range of targeted youth crime initiatives • broad variety of consultation events and strategies with further developments planned • Hear By Rights standards adopted and Mayor’s charter planned to set out what children and young people can expect • range of innovative practice includes: peer inspections, Mayor’s advisory panel, looked after children as Children’s Rights modern apprentice, rights action forum for looked after children and DVD on what young people want from Doncaster. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recidivism rates are still higher than national averages. • need to collect information to evaluate the extent of children and young people’s involvement in shaping services, and provide feedback to them on the impact this has had.

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the promising high level Doncaster Education City strategy supported by area planning groups the wide range of support for care leavers. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the low proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training at the age of 19 the low level of direct payments to support children with disabilities.
--	--

Service management

The authority has made good progress in developing effective partnerships with other agencies in the provision of children's services, and ensuring that the council's own services are sharply focused on the needs of individual children and local neighbourhoods. It has initiated a radical re-structuring of its service management which will be fully implemented from autumn 2005. Senior posts have been designated and appointments made within the new structure. A local area agreement has been concluded by the strategic partnership and this represents real progress in moving towards the declared target of developing a local culture of greater responsibility.

The council has demonstrated considerable recent success in bringing about improvements in both the education service and in children's social care. It has ensured that the support it provides for schools has realised much of the further potential identified at the time of its last inspection. Its self-assessment provides a thorough account of the key issues it faces in improving children's services. It also shows that thorough analysis has led to a range of carefully targeted activities to tackle clear priorities. In some areas, the self-assessment paid too little attention to evaluating the impact of current activities on the experiences of young people.

The social services budget and expenditure per population for children and family has increased in-year, but remains below comparators.

Existing systems of performance management have been recognised as successful through external evaluations. Staff turnover, vacancy rates and sickness levels are lower than for similar areas. However, workforce planning in some areas of the council has not been sufficiently thorough. In social services, the level of national vocational qualification and advanced qualifications of social workers is low. 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:

- teenage pregnancy strategy and its impact on current high teenage conception rates.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

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

- understanding and application of threshold criteria for social services and the quality of initial and core assessments.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- the quality of nursery provision and action taken to improve it.

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

- the levels of authorised absence in primary schools, and unauthorised absence in secondary schools which have been high.

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

- the effectiveness of support to schools in improving the levels of attainment at all key stages to a level which is comparable with similar authorities.

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

- the high levels of absence of looked after children from school.

Making a positive contribution

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

- continuing activities to reduce the level of recidivism and the impact of steps to prevent first-time offending.

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:

- Progress with the 14-19 strategy and ensuring that all young people have easy access to suitable learning programmes which are delivered in a cost effective way.

Service management

Under service management the joint area review may also wish to consider the progress made in implementing new organisational structures and new approaches in the council to improve outcomes for children and young people.

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: Doncaster 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.	2
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
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