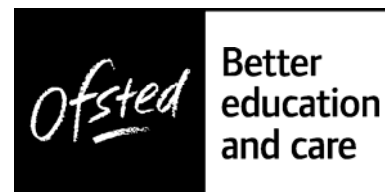


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456-404045
edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Philip Jenkinson
Chief Executive
Devon County Council
County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
Devon EX2 4QD

1 December 2005

Dear Mr Jenkinson

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 20 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 generally good. Children and young people engage actively in school sport and healthy life styles are promoted well through the youth service and the healthy schools initiative, with a coordinator posted funded jointly by education and health. The expansion of programmes that aim to raise awareness of alcohol issues is identified as an area for further development as referral to specialist substance misuse services are relatively high compared to other parts of the regions. New guidance is being provided to schools as part of the personal, health and social education curriculum. Effective strategies, including enhanced dental services, have been put in place to improve the overall health outcomes of looked-after children which are currently below comparator groups. Young offenders receive timely assessments from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and further development of provision is a key priority for the council and its partners in meeting the full range of local need. There are good links with the voluntary sector which provides accessible and informal support and counselling for young people. Teenage pregnancy rates are generally below the national average and falling across the county as a whole. The council recognises the need to continue to focus its efforts on areas where rates remain high. The collaboration between the traveller education and health visitor service is a good example of targeting resources to improve the health and well-being of some of the county's most vulnerable children.

Strong partnerships with increasing co-ordination and joint planning underpin key developments in this area. For instance, the integrated health and social care provision

for children with disabilities and communication difficulties is being expanded to provide support for children with long term illness. The council identifies the need to ensure greater consistency across the county as a key priority and good progress is being made under the strategic direction of the new Children's Trust and the Healthy Child Development Group.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall. The post- inspection plan to strengthen child protection arrangements has been completed with all children and young people on the child protection register now being allocated a qualified social worker. Effective work is undertaken in many schools to create a safe and supportive environment. There are good joint working relationships with other agencies in the move towards safeguarding boards. Inter-agency policies and procedures are comprehensive, up-to-date and reflect statutory requirements. Whilst there are plans to further develop multi-agency child protection training, too many schools do not have staff with current child protection training. It is noted that a significant training plan for 2005/06 is in place and additional capacity identified to deliver sessions in schools and multi-agency foundation courses. A further audit of all schools is planned for September 2005 and a database in place to monitor and progress chase.

CSCI inspections of regulated services indicate general compliance with national minimum standards and compliance with Child Protection policies and procedures. However, weaknesses were identified in staff recruitment practices and a revised process is now in place for all staff. This will afford children and young people a greater level of protection.

Serious case reviews are ongoing with helpful monthly meetings with the safeguarding manager to update on progress. Overview reports are nearing completion and there is a commitment to implementing lessons learned. The Area Child Protection Committee is supporting work to address and disseminate learning to all partner agencies (this is via the case review sub-committee). Performance on Child Protection reviews for 2004/05 is disappointing and has dropped since last year. Actions to address this are in place with all assessments completed in a timely way since 1 April 2005. Assessment times for children in need have improved but the percentage of core assessments completed in 35 days is down. The percentage of looked-after children allocated to a named qualified social worker is an area for improvement. This may impact on the quality and timeliness of care plan implementation.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good overall, although the achievement of some vulnerable children and young people, including those who are looked-after, compares less favourably with their peers. The quality of early years' provision is in line with national standards. There are good partnerships in place to improve the overall coordination of provision and to better support children's achievement of early learning goals. Across most key stages and in most curriculum areas, standards are improving steadily and generally compare well with the national picture. The rate of improvement for young people achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE level is significantly above the national rate. Achievement of looked-after children is well below that of similar authorities. The council rightly identifies this as a weakness and has commissioned a report to inform its improvement strategy. A Looked-after Children (Educational Attainment) co-ordinator is now in post.

Standards in primary schools are slightly below those in the secondary phase. The council is taking active steps to address issues of low aspiration and attainment in disadvantaged areas through the development of local learning communities linked to regeneration programmes. With its partners, the council is in a stronger position to tackle the underlying inequalities that impact upon achievement and standards in particular schools. Innovative approaches to the use of information communication technology are used to support children's learning in some of the more remote areas. There are also good enrichment opportunities and support for learning outside of school is promoted. A key strategy for the education service over the past few years has been to build the capacity of mainstream schools to provide for pupils with special education needs. This has included training for teachers, early intervention programmes and improved advice and support for parents. The move to a more inclusive approach has proved successful with a higher proportion of the children remaining in the mainstream and a lower proportion of statements compared to similar authorities.

Positive action is taken to re-instate children and young people who have been excluded. Rates of exclusion of pupils with special education needs and of pupils from special schools have been an area of previous poor performance. However, the council has made good progress in reducing overall exclusions as part of its Local Public Service Agreement. A more pro-active approach to early intervention and support for individual pupils identified as being at risk, coupled with greater collaboration between schools, are proving effective. Rates of absences from school have been above statistical neighbours for the past few years. This has been a priority area for the council to tackle in partnership with schools. In 2004, the truancy rate was slightly above that of similar authorities and attendance in secondary school, in particular, remains an area for further improvement.

The council has robust quality assurance processes in place and a good track record in supporting schools in difficulty, including a leadership programme for head teachers. Effective use is made of data to monitor and analyse the progress of individual schools and particular groups of children, for example from traveller communities. Compared to similar authorities and the national picture, there are very few schools in Devon in special measures.

There is a good range of affordable recreation and leisure activity provided through the youth service, the voluntary sector and local councils. However, following recent consultation with young people, partners recognise that still more needs to be done to improve access and transport, particularly for those living in the most rural parts of the county.

Making a positive contribution

There is some good practice in this area; however, outcomes for children overall are satisfactory. Children and young people engage actively in decision making in a number of key settings. The council is committed to creating structures which give children and young people a greater say in policy development - the establishment of a shadow youth scrutiny forum is a good example of this. There is, however, no overall strategy yet in place to consult children and young people systematically on the development and management of services. Compared to similar authorities, the proportion of looked- after children contributing to reviews is low.

Many schools are effective in promoting young people's understanding of citizenship, but more needs to be done to address their concerns about bullying and behaviour, thereby increasing their sense of well-being in the school environment. There has been a steady decline in the number of new young people coming into contact with youth justice services; however the rate of re-offending does not meet the national target and remains relatively high. The proportion of young offenders in employment, education and training is an area for further improvement and partners are working together to improve the range of provision suitable for this group. The increased use of direct payments to young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities provides them with greater choice and control over their lives; however they still have relatively few opportunities to influence the development of the services they receive and this is an area for improvement.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes for children and young people are generally good. The 14 – 19 strategy was produced following good consultation with key stakeholders and there is increasing breadth in the curriculum. A high proportion of all 16 – 18 year olds are in learning and looked-after children engaged in education, employment and training generally perform well. The council has set key targets to improve the quality and range of

accommodation for care leavers and is working with key partners to help young people develop independent living skills as part of Children’s Trust housing support strategy. There is also a growth in the number and type of early years’ provision across the county, offering improved choice for parents and the potential of greater economic independence for more young families.

Further work needs to be carried out to continue to improve the educational achievement of young people at aged 16 and 18 and to ensure that there is robust data available centrally to monitor the growing range and complexity of provision and options for young people aged 16 plus. The coordination of services to support young people’s transition between key stages and from school to work is an area for improvement, particularly in respect of those from minority ethnic backgrounds, young parents and other vulnerable groups who are likely to face the most significant barriers to progression.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good participation in school sport and effective programmes promoting healthy life styles • falling teenage pregnancy rates • improved co-ordination and planning between key partners. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to improve the health of looked after children and ensure effective monitoring of health care • full implementation of the CAMHS strategy.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planned moves towards safeguarding boards • safe and supportive environment in schools • good progress following service inspections. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performance in child protection reviews and assessments • safe recruitment processes, particularly in residential settings • access to child protection training for all key staff.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good partnerships supporting early years education • very good improvement at GCSE level and steady improvements at other key stages • positive action to reduce exclusion and effective work with schools to re-instate those excluded • effective support and early intervention for schools in difficulty. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • education outcomes for looked after children at all key stages • the range of accessible leisure opportunities, particularly for those in more remote areas • further development of community-wide approaches to raising aspirations, particularly in the primary phase.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some good examples of children and young people participating in decision making, including citizenship programmes • development of the use of direct payments • proportion of care leavers in education employment and training. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of an overall strategy for participation and involvement, including vulnerable groups • re-offending rates • implement strategies to increase the proportion of looked after children involved in their reviews.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good consultation in development of 14 – 19 strategy and high proportion of 16 – 18 year olds in learning • high proportion of looked after children in education, employment and training • expansion of early years provision. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to improve overall achievements post 16 • coordination of services for transition into education, employment and training for vulnerable groups.

Service management

The self-assessment is well written and the council demonstrates a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement

The council is ambitious and, through the Children’s Trust, is leading a significant change programme. It has clear priorities, an agreed vision, governance arrangements which include parents and carers, and strong all-party support. A joint Children and Young People’s Plan was established in April this year.

Devon is a pilot Local Area Agreement authority and Pathfinder Children’s Trust. The council has been successful in reducing the number of looked-after children. There is a strengthened approach to performance management and the social services modernisation agenda is resulting in moves from residential to family support, exceeding comparator authorities and others in the South West. There is a strong vision for learning and the council is well advanced in the production of a Single Education Plan. While Devon has a proven track record in innovation and strategic planning, the council recognises the challenge of ensuring greater coherence and consistency in policy implementation across a large and complex county.

There is a need to further develop performance management and management information systems to ensure a corporate approach with relevant data shared across directorates. This will involve the development of protocols for sharing information across key partner agencies.

It is important that an overall strategy is developed for the involvement of children and young people in service review and development. Services for inclusion, particularly in relation to black and minority ethnic groups, children in need and other vulnerable groups, should to be strengthened.

The council has good capacity to improve its services for children and young people further.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Looked after children's health needs are addressed:

- impact of strategies designed to improve health outcomes.

Staying safe

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

- recruitment practices and arrangements for child protection training.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- impact of strategies to raise aspirations and standards in the primary phase.

Looked after children and young people are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- impact of strategies to raise the aspirations of looked after children and to improve achievement at all key stages.

Making a positive contribution

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

- the effectiveness of strategies to reduce re-offending and to increase education, training and employment opportunities.

Economic well-being

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

- the coordination of services to support the transition of vulnerable groups into education, employment and training.

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

Cc. Anne Whitely - Director of Children's Services

APA final judgements 2005: Devon 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	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