

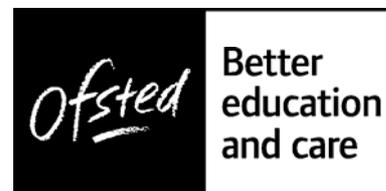
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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mrs M Asquith
Director of Children's Services
Darlington Borough Council
Town Hall
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1 December 2005

Dear Mrs Asquith

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF DARLINGTON BOROUGH 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 good. The authority promotes healthy lifestyles well through the Healthy Schools Award and its focus on improving the quality of physical education for children and young people in all schools. The incidence of teenage pregnancy has fallen and is now in line with the national trend. Looked after children have very good access to health services with more than 90% undergoing a health assessment and dental check last year, which compares favourably with similar councils. There is an effective school counselling service to which both pupils and schools can make referrals that offers fast-track arrangements for looked after children. However, links between the Youth Service, Connexions and other agencies that provide specialist advice to young people on health and personal issues are under-developed.

Several key services are delivered well through a multi-agency approach, such as the activities delivered by the multi-disciplinary teams based in the three Children's Centres. Parenting support is offered to some minority ethnic families through a Bengali women's group and a community building on a travellers' site. The work carried out by the multi-disciplinary Child and Adolescent Mental Health team (CAMHS), which has been awarded beacon status, has achieved increased referral rates, and more young people now access the services offered.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good. Children and young people are provided with a safe environment, and an anti-bullying policy and auditing process is in place in schools. A range of strategies are in place to promote equal opportunities and ensure there is a positive approach to diversity. There is proactive monitoring and follow up of racially motivated incidents, and an active domestic violence forum.

New child protection procedures were launched earlier this year, with associated training for a wide range of professionals. Training is also planned for those working with children with special educational needs and communication difficulties. The number of children on the Child Protection Register has reduced, and child protection indicators continue to be very good. However, an inspection of the Youth Service found that policies and procedures to safeguard children were not in place, and not all staff were appropriately trained. The authority responded immediately to this report, and has taken appropriate remedial action.

All looked after children have a named, qualified social worker and the number of children placed outside Darlington has reduced substantially. Work is being undertaken to monitor the well-being of vulnerable children placed in Darlington by other councils. The stability of placements continues to improve, although long term stability in foster care needs to improve further. There are low figures for two performance indicators relating to the adoption of looked after children. However the relatively small population in Darlington means that these figures can be erratic, and improvements are forecast for 2005/06.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. The quality of early years provision is satisfactory with some examples of good and very good practice noted as a result of inspection. Overall the provision supports children appropriately to meet the early learning goals. Results in reading and writing declined slightly at the end of Key Stage 1 but remain in line with averages both nationally and for statistical neighbours, although for mathematics results dropped to below the national average. At the end of Key Stage 2, results show an improving trend and are in line with national averages and above the average for statistical neighbours in English.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with national averages, showing an improvement in English. However results in mathematics and science have remained static. Results at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) have declined to below the national average. The education service has provided intensive support programmes to targeted schools focusing particularly on raising attainment in English in Key Stages 2 and 3. The authority recognises the need to provide a more rigorous challenge to its secondary schools and there is recent evidence of improvement in

some schools. Overall the progress that children and young people make between the key stages is below average. There are gender differences in performance at every key stage with girls outperforming boys by 14% in English at Key Stage 2 and by 10% at Key Stage 3. The percentage of looked after children achieving one or more GCSE has improved and is slightly above the average nationally and for similar authorities. However the proportion achieving five or more GCSEs is low.

Attendance is low compared to national figures. Rates of authorised absence in both primary and secondary schools are well above similar authorities with Darlington having the tenth highest absence rate in the country. The authority is working with identified schools to secure improvements but this has yet to have an impact on attendance rates. The number of exclusions is high in spite of work with schools on reintegration. The number of children and young people educated in placements other than at school has risen due mainly to repeat fixed-term exclusions.

Support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is satisfactory. As a result of substantial targeted support the performance of some schools shows improvement. Education services are now taking a more forceful stance with schools causing concern. Support is now coordinated through regular meetings with the senior leadership team of each identified school and monitoring is more rigorous.

There is a good structure for provision, support and advice for children with special educational needs or those with disabilities. The authority caters effectively for a wide spectrum of needs to a good standard. The quality of all statements of special educational need are monitored closely and detail curriculum and teaching arrangements as well as specific resource and transport needs. Young people's achievement and progress within the Youth Service is inadequate overall with a limited range of provision leading to formal accreditation.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. Strategies are in place to support children at transitional stages in their lives, and support is available for young carers. There is an impressive range of consultation opportunities for young people generally and for looked after children specifically. All secondary schools have school councils and there is a Youth Assembly which the authority sees as a potentially valuable vehicle for wider consultation with young people. There are plans to further increase the number of looked after children communicating their views to reviews.

The number of final warnings and convictions of looked after children increased this year, and work is being undertaken to remedy this, particularly in children's homes.

A Children's Trust for children with disabilities is in the early stages of development and an active Parents' Forum has been established.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall. Developments to improve the education and training opportunities for young people aged 14 to 19 were slow to start but have gained momentum in recent months. The proportion of young people progressing to higher education or training has increased. The authority works well with a range of partners including the local Learning and Skills Council to plan and deliver post-16 education. The 14 to 19 Trust has introduced a range of initiatives to complement the more academic programmes already in place. However these initiatives have yet to have an impact on young people's achievement.

The authority has worked effectively to help looked after children achieve economic well-being with an above average proportion in education, training or employment at the age of 19. All looked after children have pathway plans and are well supported through the Education to Employment service and work-based learning programmes. All children and young people with disabilities have transition plans to ensure that they are appropriately supported to make the transition to independent adult life.

There are schemes in place to ensure that people from ethnic minority communities, including travellers, have access to appropriate training and vocational opportunities.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people looked after children's access to health services. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> collaboration to extend the range of information, advice and guidance services for young people.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> child protection indicators are very good successful strategy to reduce the number of looked after children in external placements. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> long term stability of looked after children in foster care number of adoption orders.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> support for primary schools attendance of looked after children percentage of care leavers with one GCSE A* to G. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> progress between Key Stages 3 and 4 attendance in primary and secondary schools rates of exclusions attainment of more able looked after children.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> range of consultation opportunities for young people engagement of looked after young people support for young carers. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> final warnings and convictions of looked after children.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> transition planning for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities all care leavers have written pathway plans number of care leavers in education employment and training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> education and training opportunities for young people aged 14 to 19.

Service management

There is a strong culture of partnership working in Darlington, with a shared vision for the future drawn together through the Community Strategy. The views of children, young people, parents and carers have been taken into account in the development of priorities.

There has been an effective response to the new agenda for children's services. The self-assessment offers a clear analysis of the current position, with an honest recognition of the areas needing further development. There are realistic service plans and a process is in place to integrate them into a single plan. Resources are appropriately targeted towards priority areas.

Capacity is being built at management level, with additional support established to manage the change process. Staff turnover and vacancy levels within social care are high and could present a potential risk to delivery in future. Performance management systems are robust and link with service and financial planning systems.

The council has promising capacity for further improvement.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy life-styles are promoted for children and young people:

- the effectiveness of the provision of specialist advice to young people on health and personal issues from the Youth Service and its partner agencies.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

- the ability of the Youth Service to safeguard young people.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- the effectiveness of education services' support to improve attainment in secondary schools.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to make a positive contribution:

- impact of the Care Trust upon outcomes for children with disabilities.

Economic well-being

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

- support for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

In addition, scrutiny of the areas for development identified in the inspection of the Youth Service is recommended under all five outcomes in the joint area review.

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: Darlington 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.	2
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

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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