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Making Social Care
Better for People



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London Borough of Croydon Council

1 December 2005

Dear Colleagues

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 4th July April 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your council. 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, particularly in the way that healthy lifestyles are promoted through partnership between key services. Drug prevention has been targeted at vulnerable groups, including looked after children, pupils excluded from school and young offenders. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively and indicators exceed national averages. The incidence of teenage pregnancy has declined but is above the national trend.

The effectiveness of the actions taken to promote the mental health of children and young people is a priority for the council and underpinned by the recently completed Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) strategy. The numbers of full time equivalent social workers employed or working closely with the CAMHS team has increased in the last two years and is above the national trend. Capacity to meet need at preventative and early intervention levels has increased with four new primary mental health worker posts. The early identification of the mental health needs of looked after children has been facilitated by the new CAMHS Looked After Children Team. Pooled budgets are being actively considered within the provision of CAMHS services.

Progress continues with development of the Children's Trust, care pathways and collaborative ways of working.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good overall. Children and young people are provided with the safe environment to which they are entitled. The council's policies show good recognition of what constitutes a safe environment and their implementation is monitored consistently and rigorously.

The authority has clear referral systems, families and children at risk are identified early and the quality of preventative support is good, underpinned by the joint preventative strategy. While the numbers of children on the child protection register has increased, all cases are reviewed within timescale, and the timeliness of initial and core assessments are particularly good. All de-registrations and re-registrations from the child protection register are closely monitored and reviewed. The multi-agency Area Child Protection Committee has recently reviewed the protocol for serious case reviews, which are monitored regularly by the Committee, senior managers and elected members. All staff employed by the council are subject to enhanced CRB checks. The majority of the schools inspected in 2003-04 were judged to have very good arrangements for pupils' health, welfare and safety and all had suitable child protection procedures.

The number of children looked after by the council is higher than comparator authorities, which can be attributed to the significant numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who make up 45% of the looked after population. Effective protocols and services have been established between education and social services in supporting asylum seekers, looked after children, and those with disabilities and special educational needs. All looked after children are reviewed on time and all those eligible have a personal advisor and pathway plans. The council recognises the need for all looked after children to have a qualified social worker, which has just fallen short of their target of 100% for the past 3 years. Short-term placement stability is good. Longer-term placement stability needs to be improved, although performance is affected by the large numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and is in line with the council's comparator group and national average. The council report that robust monitoring continues to ensure all looked after children under the age of 16 are placed in registered placements, with the majority placed in foster placements or placed for adoption. However, the numbers of looked after children adopted from the council's care have fallen to 3% from the high level in the previous year. The council report that the adoption rate is expected to rise to 6.5% this year, which is more in line with the council's comparator group. The council demonstrate a thorough understanding of fluctuations in the rate of adoptions, which they expect to stabilise.

Steps are taken to ensure that the identity and whereabouts of all children are known with a local protocol in place for children who go missing from home or care. Work with Croydon PCT is underway to share information about all live births to create a comprehensive database of all children in the Borough.

Referrals of children in need have fallen as well as the number of re-referrals occurring within 12 months, although this figure remains quite high at 30%. The rate of re-referrals should continue to be reduced as planned.

The ratio of children in need that were from black and minority ethnic groups who receive services continues to increase steadily. The council has carried out a review of its policies on promoting race equality for children, which is expected to instigate improvements.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are adequate overall. The quality of early years' provision is generally good or very good and supports children well in enabling them to meet the early learning goals. There has been a significant increase in the number of day care providers and the authority is reviewing its quality assurance procedures appropriately. Registration times are better than the national average and this indicates that the authority supports the pathway to registration well. Teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 1 indicates that Croydon is below the national average and statistical neighbours for reading and writing and that this is a widening gap since 2002. The support provided by the education service in implementing the national literacy strategy has not focused sufficiently on this weaker area. Boys and pupils for whom English is an additional language, particularly Bangladeshi, are identified as underachieving. However, the Bangladeshi pupils do not underachieve generally by the end of Key Stage 2.

At Key Stage 2, test results indicate good attainment in writing; mathematics results are in line with national results but below statistical neighbours and science results are below both national and statistical neighbours. Overall attainment at Key Stage 3 is below that of statistical neighbours although rates of improvement are greater than the national rate. This is accounted for partly by the fact that a proportion of more able pupils move to selective schools outside the borough for their secondary education. This also has an effect at the end of Key Stage 4. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C is in line with national levels but has been below statistical neighbours for the last five years. The proportion of A*-G grades however is in line with statistical neighbours. Progress between Key Stages 2 and 4, and 3 and 4 is above average. The rate of improvement at GCSE is above the national rate of improvement.

The education service has recognised the need to provide a more rigorous challenge to its secondary schools; enhanced leadership in targeted schools has resulted in significant improvement. Guidance on school improvement issued by the education service is good. The proportion of looked after children gaining one or more GCSE is improving, but the council recognises that this is an area for further improvement, although it is in line with National averages. The percentage of care leavers with five or more GCSEs is higher than comparator and national figures. Black African pupils and black Caribbean pupils have made gains but continue to be the lowest attaining groups at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. The council has established a looked after children education team, which is effective in tracking the progress of individual pupils. In addition it provides a wide range of services, including training and support for designated teachers, social workers and carers.

Support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is effective. The speed of removal from a specific category is better than the national average. However, the number of schools in a category of concern has risen since 2001.

Since 2000, there has been a marginal fall in the number of looked after children absent from school and the latest figure is around 11 per cent, which although in line with the council's comparator group is an area for improvement. Attendance overall remains below national rates but is improving and surplus places at primary schools have been reduced. However, levels of authorised absence are above those in similar authorities. The number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions has fallen but the fixed term exclusion rate has increased. The proportion of excluded pupils who have a Statement of Educational Needs is a particular concern. There is a focus on re-integration and widening opportunities through alternative provision. However, there are high numbers of pupils receiving alternative provision and rates of re-integration are too low.

There are good opportunities for recreational and voluntary learning in the borough.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. The number of looked after children who offend is reducing, with the youth offending team successfully decreasing the number of first timers offenders in the youth justice system and the rate of re-offending. The number of first time offenders entering the criminal justice system is projected to rise this year. The Youth Offending Team and police are in discussion to deliver juvenile disposal training to police officers to ensure appropriate pre-court and post-court decisions are taken. Young people at risk of offending are identified through a number of multi agency resource panels, including the Youth and Junior Youth Inclusion and Support Panel (YISP and JYIP), established through use of Children's Fund money.

The majority of children and young people are well supported in managing changes in their lives. 84% of looked after children contribute their opinions at reviews. The council has implemented strategies in place to help children and young people with disabilities and special education needs to manage the transition between specific phases in their lives.

The council has established a number of services and innovative ways to elicit the views of children and young people, including the Young Peoples Strategic Partnership, which has an agreed participation policy. Children and young people have contributed to the development of the preventative strategy and 'Being safe in Croydon' with senior councillors and officers. The formation of a steering group to set up a Youth Parliament has been a positive outcome. The Children's Fund programme has a participation project Xpress and the Children's Rights Service, RESPECT provides advocacy and support to enable children and young people to participate in service development. The council has established a Youth Panel, chaired by the cabinet member for education. Although it is not always made clear how the views of children and young people influence policy or how elected members take account of them, there are examples where this has happened such as in the development of the preventative strategy and through the work of RESPECT.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good overall although attainment of students taking post-16 examinations is well below national levels. This is partly accounted for because a high proportion of students move out of the borough to pursue academic courses at the end of Key Stage 4. Participation in post-16 education, employment or training is good. Within this phase, the proportion of care leavers continues to improve and the number of care leavers in education, training or employment at age 19 is relatively high. Strategies to further improve this proportion are planned. Transition reviews are undertaken for all young people, aged 16, who are looked after, incorporating their plan for education, training and employment.

There is a relatively low proportion of young people supervised by the Youth Offending Team who take part in education, employment or training. Additional funding has been allocated to enable the connexions service to work with the YOT increase support. Vulnerable pupils in Year 11 are given additional support on a link programme to colleges. This is likely to improve outcomes.

The number of disabled children in need who receive a service is increasing, although only a small number of direct payments are made to carers of disabled children. This is an area for improvement although the council report that many parents of children with disabilities choose not to have direct payments.

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. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluation expressed in terms of expected outcomes for service users.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing children and young people with a safe environment child protection procedures; timely initial and core assessments support for looked after children services for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and extension of work with the Asylum Screening Unit based in Croydon council's review of policies on promoting race equality for children; well placed to deliver on Safeguarding Board arrangements work underway to establish a comprehensive database identifying all children in Croydon with PCT. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> further reduction in re-referrals of children in need as planned all looked after children have an allocated qualified social worker; long-term placement stability for looked after children particularly unaccompanied asylum seeking children rate of adoptions.

<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dedicated Looked After Children Education Team • good support for schools causing concern • good participation in post-16 provision • the quality of Early Years education; • employment education and training for care leavers. 	<p>Enjoying and achieving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational qualifications of looked after children • attainment generally, especially at the primary stage • attendance of looked after children; • the number of permanent exclusions.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rate of re-offending has reduced through effective YOT and diversionary activities • effective support services and procedures to enable children and young people to make a positive contribution • high numbers of looked after children contributing their opinions to reviews; • participation policy. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectiveness of the outcome of participation by children and young people in directly influencing policy development.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high numbers of care leavers in Employment, Education or Training (EET). 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uptake of direct payments. • improve the number of supervised juveniles in EET.

Service management

The authority has collaborated closely with relevant partners in analysing needs and setting appropriate, challenging targets for improvement. Consultation takes place with children, young people and their families in a planned way supported by the council's participation policy.

Priorities for children and young people are shared and agreed with partners in the Children's and Young People's Strategic Partnership. The local preventative strategy is the basis upon which the children and young people's plan will be constructed.

The council plans to introduce a Director of Children's Services to further develop the integration of services and systems to promote better outcomes for children and young people. The integration of structures within the council is an area that must start to be addressed in order to meet local and government aspirations. The council will be developing a programme for the restructuring of departments, the creation of a Director of Children's Services and the steps to be undertaken to achieve this in 2006 for implementation in 2007.

Performance management systems are well developed and embedded. However, the council's comparative performance nationally on social care performance indicators has deteriorated and should be addressed.

The council has been particularly successful in reducing staff vacancies (5%) and turnover (7.1%), although this will continue to present ongoing challenges.

Corporate commitment is demonstrated by additional funding allocated within the current financial year. The council report that there are some pressures emerging within leaving care services, primarily as a result of a growing number of relevant former unaccompanied asylum seeking children with no recourse to public funds for which the council does not receive any grant support.

The council has promising capacity to improve further.

Areas for exploration in the Joint Area Review:

Being healthy

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

- improvement of outcome focus, as a result of work between CORK (independent research facility) and CAMHS

Staying safe

Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

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

- strength of services for asylum seeker children as an area of good practice.
- improvement in the long-term placement stability for looked after children.
- improvement in developing local placement capacity.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- improvement in educational attainment

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

- attendance and attainment of looked after children.

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

All children and young people can access a range of recreational and voluntary learning provision:

- responsiveness of services to children in need.

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

Educational provision is made for children who do not attend school:

- levels of permanent exclusion.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and in supporting the community:

- effectiveness of the outcome of participation by children and young people in directly influencing policy development.

Achieving economic well-being

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

- improvement in uptake of direct payments.

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

- proportion of vulnerable young people in EET.

Final judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



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Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



Jonathan Phillips
Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: London Borough of Croydon 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 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