

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456-404045  
[edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk)



Making Social Care  
Better for People



Mr Tony Eccleston  
Director of Education, Children's  
Services and Libraries  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Seymour House  
38 Broadway  
Bracknell  
Berkshire  
RG12 1AU

**1 December 2005**

Dear Mr Eccleston

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF BRACKNELL FOREST BOROUGH  
COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005**

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on Monday 4 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**

The outcomes in this area are good. Bracknell Forest is committed to promoting and maintaining good health for children and young people. Universal services are used particularly well to promote healthy living, with effective actions taken to target specific groups, for example looked-after children. A high percentage of schools are involved in the National Healthy Schools Standard initiative; this includes active participation in sport and healthy eating programmes. In addition to the standard screening from birth to the age of five, there is comprehensive screening of all children at the age of five years to ensure early identification of any barriers to learning. The borough has successfully extended the advisory aspects of this service to parents.

Partnership working with health is good. The borough has provided opportunities for teachers to undertake training with school nurses on personal, social and health education programmes. This is an innovative approach to equip staff to teach about sensitive issues, such as the dangers of substance misuse. The rate of teenage conceptions has dropped although the council recognises there is still much to do. The project with young fathers is one way in which the council is seeking to ensure that teenage conception and pregnancy is not seen solely as a female issue.

There is positive performance in respect of looked after children's health care with almost four-fifths receiving an annual health assessment and dental checks. The council is aware that this is a marginal drop in performance from last year and that improvement is needed in this area over the coming year. However, some of the underperformance is explained, in part, by older children making choices not to take up health care assessments. There are partnerships in place with the Primary Care Team to ensure that dedicated health care workers support looked after children in making best use of health care screening and assessment.

There have been capacity issues with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) during the past year and low staffing levels had resulted in the service being limited to a smaller number of children and young people. The council has addressed these issues, in part, but further monitoring is required to ensure full access for all children and young people who would benefit from this service. A commendable pilot project has been run in some schools, in partnership with MIND, to assess all Year 3 pupils in order to identify early the need for additional support or intervention.

## **Staying safe**

The outcomes in this area are good. There is an established Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) with key agencies ensuring that all policies and procedures are embedded in practice. The robust ACPC and the associated networks provide a firm foundation on which to develop the new Safeguarding Board. The need for improvement in working beyond the boundaries of the borough has been identified and plans are in place to re-write the Berkshire Child Protection procedures to address this issue. This is essential as the Thames Valley Police Constabulary covers all unitary authorities in the county.

The council has an effective training programme in place for staff working with or having access to children and young people. This includes staff in independent schools. The council has successfully obtained data on children and young people's experience of bullying and is using the information to inform existing anti bullying policies.

There are successful mechanisms in place to establish the identity and whereabouts of all children and young people aged 0 to 16. This includes positive liaison with the police, social care services and education providers especially in response to local concerns about each child's or young person's whereabouts. The council acknowledges that further work is required on developing protocols for children missing from home and plans are in place with neighbouring councils to agree a Berkshire wide protocol.

The council is complying with the requirement of allocating a qualified social worker to all children on the child protection register. Two unqualified social workers have been allocated to two looked after children. However, this is based on an accurate risk

assessment of the needs of these two children, with effective use of resources and good training, support and supervision by a qualified social work manager.

There is a high level of participation of all looked after children in their reviews including access to an independent advocate. Bracknell Forest has built in external scrutiny by using independent chairs of review panels to improve further the quality of the support that children receive when they prepare for their reviews.

The steady improvement in initial assessment undertaken within seven days, and core assessment of children in need completed within 35 days, indicates further improvement in partnership working across key partners. This progress is helped by shared and agreed standard documentation so that referrals, for example, include all key data.

The monitoring of services provided to children and young people in residential care and foster placements, including in-house provision, is good. This monitoring is also effective for children and young people placed out of borough. The use of reviews, unannounced visits and responses to Commission for Social Care Inspection activity are positive ways to check on the quality of provision and outcomes for children. The protection of children and young people with disabilities is explicitly addressed in all policies and procedures designed to safeguard children. Children with disabilities receiving respite care have good access to reviews. The council has adapted its complaints procedures well to make them accessible to all children.

There has been steady improvement against the government's performance indicators for reviews of child protection cases, the duration on the register and adoptions of looked-after children. There is positive improvement in the numbers of young children looked after in foster placements or placed for adoption, with marginal improvement for children over ten years looked after in foster placements or placed for adoption. The council recognises that there is a shortfall in the number of carers and adopters for older children, including those with disabilities.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

Outcomes in this area are good. Early years' provision is strong and supports children well in enabling them to meet the early learning goals. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are above national averages and rates of improvement match those of statistical neighbours. The support provided by the education service in implementing the primary strategy is effective and rightly focused on weaker aspects, in particular reading and the lower performance of boys in literacy and numeracy.

Standards at Key Stages 2 and 3 are good. Results are particularly strong in English and science at Key Stage 2 and in English and mathematics in Key Stage 3. Results at Key Stage 4 have improved significantly for the last three years and are now close to

the national average at five or more A\*-C grades and well above national and statistical neighbours at five or more A\*-G grades. Progress between Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 is good and satisfactory between Key Stage 3 and GCSE. The authority is taking energetic action to address underperformance. Support is targeted effectively to improve the performance of boys and of young people from minority ethnic groups. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress.

The number of looked after children eligible to sit the GCSE examination is very small. Their results are good with 77% achieving at least one GCSE at grades A\*-G, well above the national and statistical neighbours' average. Professional staff know these children well and are aware of the need to raise their attainment further and improve their attendance in order to maximise their potential and improve the number of those achieving a GCSE at A\*- C grade. The council works effectively with carers to increase the proportion of looked after children who take advantage of extra-curricular activities provided by schools.

Attendance is good. Rates of exclusions are in line with the national figure in primary schools. The rate of permanent exclusions is above average in secondary schools. The authority is monitoring these trends effectively, with relevant plans in place for alternative provision and specialist support to improve behaviour in schools and to reintegrate pupils into mainstream education or work. Reintegration rates are in line with the national and statistical neighbours' figures.

There are sufficient suitable and accessible school places. A full review of surplus places was conducted in 2003 to address the issues of surplus places by 2008. Support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is effective. The only secondary school in special measures is now out of that category and the two primary schools with weaknesses are making satisfactory progress. Monitoring is rigorous and the authority's proactive approach to intervention results in fewer schools being identified as causing concern.

The council's provision of youth and community facilities is good and there is increased involvement by young people, particularly those with special educational needs or disabilities. The council's monitoring of this provision shows that the wider range of support has enabled these particular young people to have fun in a safe environment and to take part in programmes to increase their knowledge and skills.

### **Making a positive contribution**

The outcomes for this area are good. Early years' services are good with low levels of action required at registration and after inspection. Schools contribute to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development well and actively promote freedom from bullying and harassment. There has been a positive increase in the numbers of Year 11 school leavers involved in voluntary or part- time activities.

The numbers of young people who are known to the Youth Offending Team and are in education, training or employment is high. The number of first-time offenders is low and the rate of re-offending behaviour has reduced. Plans are in place to reduce this further in line with locally agreed targets. The situation is less positive in respect of a small number of looked after children who have received final warning, reprimands or convictions. The council recognises the potential negative impact on the life chances of these young people and is actively considering what additional interventions are required.

The links between the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the Youth Offending Team are not, at present, sufficiently robust to maximise positive outcomes for children and young people. The council is aware of the difficulties and recent appointments have been made to secure improvement.

There are many opportunities for all young people, including those who have special educational needs or are vulnerable, to express their views. A high percentage of young people communicate their views at their statutory reviews and the council has plans to increase this percentage further. The council successfully encourages active participation of young people at key transition times in their lives, for example at the end of Year 9 and as they finish compulsory education.

### **Achieving economic well-being**

Outcomes in this area are good overall. The commitment to engaging young people in the council's new community strategy and raising their awareness of the world of learning and the world of work is strong. An increasing number of young people use the youth service. There is, however, a weakness in the GCE/VCE/A-AS examination results, which are below the averages for national and statistical neighbours.

The support given to looked after children and children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. There is strong commitment to ensure that transition at key points in their schooling is smooth. The Connexions service has good systems in place to ensure that all 13 to 19 year olds who are most in need receive one to one support so as to ease their transition to adult life and economic independence. The authority is seeking to improve the person centred plan to meet each young person's learning and vocational needs. The percentage of care leavers in education, training or employment is below the national average; however plans are in hand to improve communication and multi-agency working so as to maximise support and improve outcomes at age 19. There is still a small group of young people not in education, employment or training who have specific and challenging needs. The council continues to have effective contact with this group of young people who are offered on-going support.

The quality of education provided for 14 to 19 year olds is satisfactory and the proportion of young people progressing to higher education or training is above the national averages. There is good partnership and collaboration in the planning of post 16 education and training. The authority works effectively with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), particularly in improving the range of vocational options. Officers are aware of the need to broaden provision to ensure that the educational needs of different groups are met, in particular those of young people who are underachieving or are at risk of not meeting their potential. In partnership with the LSC, comprehensive systems have been put in place to monitor standards post-16 in order to raise performance in the GCE/VCE/A-AS examinations. The impact of these initiatives has yet to be demonstrated over time although the recent improvement of 1.5% in the A Level pass rate is promising.

## SUMMARY

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Areas for improvement</b>
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• partnerships with local partners especially the Primary Care Trust</li> <li>• success in lowering the rate of teenage conception</li> <li>• promotion of healthy living across universal and targeted services.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eligibility criteria to CAMHS</li> <li>• reduction in teenage conception rates.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multi-agency approach to establish the identity and whereabouts of all children and young people aged 0 to 16</li> <li>• child protection procedures</li> <li>• training of staff</li> <li>• monitoring and review of child protection cases.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protocol for children missing from home</li> <li>• number of foster carers and adopters for children with disabilities</li> <li>• stability of placements for children in foster care.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• early years' provision</li> <li>• rising trend in results in national tests and examinations</li> <li>• support and challenge to schools, including those in Ofsted's categories of concern</li> <li>• progress of children and young people with special educational needs.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• differences in performance between boys and girls</li> <li>• attendance and attainment of looked-after children</li> <li>• exclusions in secondary schools.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduction in re-offending rates and first time offending</li> <li>• protocols in place to engage all looked after children in reviews</li> <li>• monitoring of all reviews by independent chairs.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• final warnings, convictions and reprimands for looked-after children.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• planning for the 14-19 strategy</li> <li>• support to children and young people at key transition points</li> <li>• increase in young people's use of the youth service.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GCE/VCE/AS-A level results</li> <li>• number of care leavers in education, training and employment.</li> </ul>

## Service management

Service management is good. Collaboration with relevant partners is a major strength. Parents, carers, children and young people have been consulted and, although still requiring consolidation, their views are taken into account in establishing priorities for development.

Substantial progress is being made in moving towards the production of a single children and young people's plan from 2006. The current planning strategy is based on a thorough analysis of needs. Priorities are clear, with good focus on performance and outcomes. The Change for Children project team has established a number of relevant groups to ensure the effective implementation of the Children's Trust. The education service has an accurate knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses with a good framework to assess the impact of strategies and policies.

The authority is not complacent and continues to improve collaborative work between agencies. The pooling of budgets to capitalise on all existing resources is limited to date and has been identified as an area for development in the Change for Children Project Plan. The cost of placing looked after children out of the borough is currently too high. There are many examples of services working together well, for example to improve provision for looked after children and those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Performance management is rigorous. Workforce issues are addressed well and the council manages the challenges of staff recruitment and retention effectively.

The council has good 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:*

- CAMHS performance.

### **Staying safe**

*Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:*

- impact of actions to address issues of bullying in schools.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

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

- achievement and attendance of looked after children
- attainment and achievement 14-19.

### **Making a positive contribution**

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

- impact of interventions to reduce re-offending by looked after children.

### **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:*

- quality and effectiveness of person centred planning
- impact of the 14-19 strategy on outcomes at age 19.



## 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: Bracknell Forest Borough Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements <sup>1</sup>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	<b>3</b>
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	<b>3</b>
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	<b>3</b>
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	<b>3</b>

---

### 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