



Pilot joint area review of children's services

West Sussex Children's Services Authority Area

Better
education
and care

Inspection of services for children and young people

Summary Report

Adult Learning Inspectorate
Audit Commission
Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)
Healthcare Commission
HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HM Inspectorate of Court Administration
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
HM Inspectorate of Probation
Ofsted

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CONTEXT

West Sussex is a large, relatively diverse county in the south of England. The majority of the population, including most children and young people, live in small and medium sized towns along the south coast and on the eastern and north eastern edges. The rural areas and many of the towns are generally prosperous but there are pockets of disadvantage in both. The population is older and is less ethnically diverse than that of the rest of the country. Children and young people in West Sussex are served by a local strategic partnership made up of the county, district and borough councils; five primary care and four NHS acute trusts plus the NHS health and social care trust that provides mental health services; the Sussex police force; the local Learning and Skills council; the Connexions service; and a number of private, community and voluntary organisations. A recently established Children's Trust leads the development of services for children and young people.

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for most children and young people in West Sussex are positive. From the evidence gathered, children and young people appear safe. Good quality childcare places are available to all who require them. The educational standards achieved by most children and young people are good overall, but they are lower along the coastal strip and in Crawley. The gap in attainment between the majority of children and young people and those who are looked after is wider than is found nationally. Most children and young people behave responsibly and some make significant contributions to their schools and the areas in which they live. Young people are prepared well for working life. They are more likely to be in education, employment or training than elsewhere in the country. Young people leaving the care of the local authority sometimes have difficulties finding affordable, adequate housing. The majority of children and young people are healthy. A small number of children and young people with mental health problems wait for too long for the help they need. Too many children with complex needs are educated out of the county.

The impact of local services

Local services have a beneficial impact on outcomes for most children and young people. The findings of this review corroborate most of the judgements reached by the authority and its partners in their self assessment. Health education and provision are good, except for significant recognised weaknesses with child and adolescent mental health services. The most

vulnerable children and young people are safeguarded well from abuse and exploitation. The council and its partners work effectively to provide children and young people with high quality education and training and to enable them to play an active part in their schools and communities. However, educational provision for looked after children and those excluded from school is inadequate. Looked after children and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are not always involved sufficiently in decisions about their futures. Consultation with children and young people is wide-ranging, but not well co-ordinated.

West Sussex County Council and its partners have a clear and ambitious vision to transform, and improve further, services for children and young people. The foundations for putting this vision into practice are securely in place and developments are on track. The capacity for further improvement is good. Services are well managed and resources are generally sufficient. A shortage of qualified social workers services reduces the amount and continuity of support for some children and young people. Social and caring services do not have sufficiently consistent and robust quality assurance procedures in place.

Being healthy

The combined work of all local services in securing the health of children and young people is good and partnership working between agencies across the county is generally strong. Young children and their parents and carers receive good support. Immunisation programmes are in place and take up rates are high. The early identification and assessment of children's health needs is effective. Health education programmes on sexual health, substance misuse, healthy eating, physical activity and emotional well being are promoted well by schools and the council, co-ordinated through the West Sussex Healthy Schools programme, 'Investors in Health'. However, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) across the county are under-resourced and not sufficiently well co-ordinated. As a result, some children and young people wait a long time for services providing early intervention.

Staying safe

The overall contribution of services to keeping children and young people safe is adequate, with some important strengths. Furthermore, the capacity for improvement is good. Those most at risk of abuse or other serious harm are protected well by multi-agency work with the council giving a strong lead. Arrangements for those on the child protection register are secure. Steps taken to minimise the incidence of child abuse and neglect

are effective. The number of children and young people on the child protection register is in line with the national average. Despite some shortcomings within the council's social and caring services, pragmatic action by managers keeps children safe. However, the level of vacancies for qualified social workers reduces the continuity and consistency of support for some children and young people. Some, including care leavers, do not have an allocated social worker. Furthermore, there are no consistently implemented procedures for assuring the quality of casework or auditing case files of children and young people. Re-referrals are increasing in line with the national picture.

Enjoy and achieve

The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people enjoy their education and recreation and to achieve well is good. The council works effectively with its partners to provide a wide range of opportunities for education and enjoyment. Universal educational provision is of good quality. The council supports schools well and this results in very few being judged as causing concern. Currently, educational outcomes for vulnerable groups of children and young people are in line with national averages. However, the gap between the achievement of the majority of children and young people and those who are looked after is wider than elsewhere.

Making a positive contribution

The overall contribution of services in helping children and young people to contribute to society is good. Children and young people are helped to develop socially and emotionally and the range of opportunities for them to take personal responsibility is good. Many opportunities exist for them to participate in decision making and to play an active part in their communities. Some young people in rural areas are prevented from becoming as involved as those in urban areas because of transport difficulties. There is good support for those who face particular challenges such as transition to work or college; young parenthood; and difficulties with drugs and alcohol. Care leavers and those children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, moving from child to adult services, are less well supported. The number of children and young people who offend is low overall but rates of re-offending are slightly higher than those found nationally.

Achieving economic well being

The overall contribution of services to helping children and young people achieve economic well being is good. Educational outcomes are on the whole positive, although children and young people living in Crawley and

along the coastal strip achieve less well. The Connexions service is contributing significantly to the high numbers of young people in education, employment and training, including over 70% of care leavers. Opportunities for them to participate in learning are increasing and broadening. The lack of affordable, adequate housing affects all children and young people and in particular care leavers and those leaving secure accommodation.

Support for children looked after

Overall, looked after children, receive adequate support particularly from their social workers. A very small number, however, wait too long for a school place. Additional educational support for those who need it, is currently limited and difficult to access, although improvements are being implemented. A number of care leavers use former foster carers' homes as supported lodgings, partly because of the difficulties they face in finding affordable suitable housing. This does not address their longer term housing needs. Looked after children in short term placements experience significant difficulties in accessing CAMHS therapeutic services. This is unsatisfactory.

Support for children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities

Overall, children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported adequately and achieve satisfactory educational outcomes. Effective systems are in place to identify children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at an early stage. A single assessment process has not yet been developed. Consultation with children, young people, parents and carers is limited both at an individual level and in terms of policy development. The authority and its partners recognise in their self-evaluation that too many children and young people with complex needs are educated out of county. This is costly and means that they are away from their families and communities. However, the authority is committed to inclusive provision and is investing heavily to increase its capacity to meet the needs of children and young people with a broad range of special educational needs. At the time of the review, very small numbers of children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities were not allocated to qualified social workers. Some parents of disabled children find it difficult to access social and care support.

Service management

Overall, the management of services for children and young people is good. Partnerships are effective at a strategic level: operational links, particularly between health and others are less strong but improving. District councils and the voluntary sector are not yet represented on the Children's Trust Board. The

council has established some cross directorate services and is giving a strong lead in developing innovative ways of multi-agency working in local areas through joint access teams (JATs). Service management within the council is good with effective prioritisation and service delivery. The capacity to improve further is good.

Grades awarded

4: outstanding; 3: good; 2: satisfactory; 1: inadequate

	Local services overall	Council services
Being healthy	3	
Staying safe	2	
Enjoying and achieving	3	
Making a positive contribution	3	
Achieving economic well-being	3	
Service management	3	
Capacity to improve	3	3
Children's services overall		3
The education service		3
The social care services for children		2
The health service for children		3

RECOMMENDATIONS

For immediate action

Improve medical support for looked after children and young people in secure homes by ensuring they have access to on-call GP services.

For action over the next six months

Improve the quality of services provided to children and young people, and in particular to those who are most vulnerable by reducing the number of vacancies for qualified social workers; implementing quality assurance procedures for casework, a consistent format for case files and regular auditing

of those files; and improving staffing levels and case loads within the leaving care team.

Ensure the Children's Trust reviews budgets for children's services across the area and ensure that they are:

- i. based on clear analyses of anticipated need in the medium-term;
- ii. focused on the delivery of shared priorities; and
- iii. pooled with budgets of partners where this will improve service delivery

Improve access to affordable housing for young people and ensure it for those who are vulnerable by moving swiftly to agree and implement a strategy, paying particular attention to the needs of care leavers and those leaving secure accommodation.

Improve the provision of child and adolescent mental health services by:

- o ensuring front line staff such as GPs, health visitors and school nurses have sufficient resources to manage effectively all cases of mental health problems;
- o agreeing and implementing assessment and treatment protocols;
- o ensuring that information is readily available to parents, carers and young people in easily accessible formats and places; and
- o extending access to therapeutic services to looked after children in short term placements.

Improve access for children and young people to speech and language therapy services by reducing waiting times and agreeing consistent criteria for access to services.

Improve the effectiveness of the joint access teams (JATs) and increase confidence in their work by ensuring that decisions made by JATs consistently safeguard children by establishing rigorous quality assurance procedures.

Improve educational provision for children and young people who have been permanently excluded from school and for those who are looked after by ensuring that:

- o a wide range of high quality full-time provision is available for excluded pupils;
- o establishing a database to track individual excluded pupils and their achievements and to provide information to enable the monitoring and evaluation of types of provision, including costs;

- ensuring places in local schools are found quickly for looked after children; and
- ensuring that front line staff and foster carers know when and how to access additional educational support for looked after children.

Improve provision for children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities by:

- extending access to social care services beyond those who have the most complex needs;
- improving the transition between children's and adult services; and
- increasing the participation of these children and young people, and their parents and carers in decisions about their individual care and about future policy and provision.

Improve services for children and young people from ethnic minorities by:

- putting in place arrangements for monitoring the ethnicity of those using services and for auditing and evaluating the outcomes; and
- ensuring staff have the training and experience required to recognise and meet the specific needs of children and young people from ethnic minorities.

For action in the longer term

Improve opportunities for children and young people to make a positive contribution to the local area by putting in place an overarching strategy for consultation with children and young people including arrangements to co-ordinate activities, evaluate findings and feedback outcomes.

Improve provision for those children and young people with the most complex needs by ensuring that more children and young people, with the most complex needs can live at home.