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Making Social Care  
Better for People



Mr Richard Hubbard  
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**1 December 2005**

Dear Mr Hubbard

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF WEST BERKSHIRE 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 children's 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 collects a good range of local data and information, providing a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses across the area and enabling effective targeting of work. Healthy lifestyles are being promoted and the self-assessment accurately demonstrates how key services are working together effectively through partnership arrangements to improve outcomes and provision.

School inspection judgements show that support for this outcome is good and a high number of schools are working towards the healthy schools standard. There has also been notable success in supporting young people to stop smoking, with an 80% cessation rate for targeted groups compared with 30% nationally. The incidence of teenage pregnancy is low and reducing.

The health needs of looked after children are consistently being met to a high level. Joint working, including a nurse funded through the Primary Care Trust (PCT), has helped bring about significant improvement in health assessments, dental and optical care.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service has historically been poorly resourced. There is now a pooled budget with seven partners, and services are improving slowly.

Support is available to families and carers and also to staff working with young people, but staffing levels remain low and assessments have not always been carried out within agreed timescales. Staffing has been increased to develop an intensive counselling service, and to provide more psychologist time to assess the mental health needs of young people known to the Youth Offending Team.

## **Staying safe**

Outcomes in this area are good. Children and young people are provided with a safe environment and joint referral and monitoring systems are in place for pupils and children at risk. Schools have comprehensive health and safety arrangements and there is good promotion of care and welfare. Inspections of regulated social care services showed no major shortfalls, and services have been reviewed and redesigned to meet need.

There is strong multi-agency engagement for child protection and key services collaborate well at both the strategic and operational levels. Published plans for the future confirm that the authority is committed to a preventative strategy and to integrating services to increase effectiveness. Plans are in place to create a multi-agency team for children across health, education and social care, with a strong preventative agenda.

The number of children on the child protection register is very low, due to a range and variety of preventative approaches including the successful use of family group conferences, which enable the wider family to find solutions before formal procedures are implemented. All children on the child protection register have an allocated qualified social worker, and all child protection cases have been reviewed on time. There have been some delays with initial assessments for children in need. The authority has begun to address this through a performance management approach, and improvements are starting to materialise.

The increase in numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children is having an impact on services provided for looked after children, but performance remains satisfactory, and placement stability is very good. 98% of looked after children have a named, qualified social worker. There is strong multi-agency commitment to looked after children with special educational needs, however choices about care for children in need are limited, and the authority is aware that more options need to be developed.

There are protocols in place for reporting and monitoring the whereabouts of children who are out of school. Where pupils are excluded the authority makes appropriate provision, however not all pupils who are permanently excluded receive education within fifteen days.

## Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are generally high and the contribution of services is good in most cases. A comprehensive range of strategies is employed to address underachievement, and there is good use of data and pupil tracking to target intervention and support. The authority's self-assessment demonstrates an extensive knowledge of weaker areas, schools and aspects of performance. The proportion of schools in formal categories of concern has reduced and early intervention is proving successful in keeping these numbers low. School inspections in 2003-2004 showed a high proportion of schools where pupil attitudes, opportunities for enrichment, support for learning outside the school day and the quality of teaching and learning were good or very good.

Although standards attained by primary school pupils are in line with or above those seen nationally and in similar authorities, there has been a dip in performance in some aspects such as reading and writing at Key Stage 1 and mathematics at Key Stage 2. Following detailed analysis and tracking of pupils, the authority has established feasible plans to improve these curriculum areas and to tackle underachievement in specific schools.

Secondary school performance is good. Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 have improved steadily and are now above those in similar authorities and nationally. Pupils make good progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. In addition, the performance of many vulnerable groups, such as children looked after and those with learning difficulties and disabilities, is improving. Underperformance at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 by some black and minority ethnic groups is being targeted through joint team work, but the impact of this work is not yet fully realised. Looked after children are well supported and generally achieve good educational outcomes. Some innovative provision has been made at one school for visually impaired pupils through joint developments with the Royal National Institute for the Blind.

Although still in line with the national average, the increase in fixed term exclusions in secondary schools is recognised as an area of concern and robust measures, including cross-agency work, are in place and are being further developed to address this issue. Pupils in alternative education such as pupil referral units achieve good results, reintegration rates are above average and a high percentage of young people move into education, training or employment.

Some extensive mapping of out of school hours provision has been undertaken, but tracking of provision and take-up is not yet enabling a more strategic approach to non-statutory education and leisure activities for children and young people.

## **Making a positive contribution**

Outcomes in this area are good. The youth offending service is one of the top performers in the country. The number of first-time entrants to the youth justice service is reducing. The rate of re-offending has increased but figures are based on low cohorts, so fluctuate considerably. The service works with offenders and victims with the aim of resolving issues in a mutually acceptable way, and has also increased the amount of structured work with parents. There is strong partnership work to maximise the effectiveness of anti-social behaviour orders, and joint funding is available to support education for young offenders out of school.

Pupils who may experience difficulty at times of transition are identified early, and support is provided if necessary. Traveller children are all receiving education. The educational performance of young offenders is tracked so that targeted support can be given if necessary. Offending rates for looked after children are low.

The authority is continuing to promote the voice of young people. Children and young people have been encouraged to contribute their views to plans and they have been involved in the appointment of key staff. They have also participated in the Children and Young People's Partnership AGM and contributed their views to the design of the children and young people's service.

There is an expectation that all children and young people take part in all reviews, conferences and planning meetings, and a range of communication and consultation tools is available to support children with disabilities. Most looked after children are contributing to their reviews, although there is room for improvement and the authority is seeking to encourage greater ownership of the process by young people. The authority is clear about how it is promoting racial equality for children and families by identifying service outcomes and monitoring the impact of its policies.

## **Achieving economic well-being**

The authority's contribution to young people achieving economic well-being is effective and although some developments are at an early stage of implementation, outcomes are good. The limited evidence from Ofsted school inspections indicates that 14 – 19 provision is generally good or very good. The attainment of young people at age 16 shows an incremental improvement and standards are above national averages and those of similar authorities. Although uptake of work-based learning is low, partly as a result of high employment opportunities, levels of retention and attainment are high. Post-16 attainment shows a marginal trend of improvement and the authority recognises the need for further development. Funding from the Learning and Skills Council is being used to analyse the achievements and quality of post-16 provision. The proportion of young people aged 16 and above not in education, employment or training is well below national and regional averages.

Links between the local authority and the Connexions service are good, particularly at a strategic level. Progress has been made in developing a joint strategic approach with partners including the Learning and Skills Council on 14-19 education and training, and a local plan is now being prepared. A curriculum audit has been completed and two projects targeted at improving access for identified pupils have been established. As yet outcomes have not improved, but all the necessary building blocks are now in place and there is good potential for improvement.

Looked after young people and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported through transition and pathway plans. A higher percentage of care leavers are in education, training or employment than in similar authorities. The council is aware of the need for more supported tenancies for these vulnerable young people although a range of accommodation options is available.

The uptake of direct payments has been slow, but plans are in place to encourage greater usage.

## SUMMARY

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Areas for improvement</b>
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low teenage pregnancy rates</li> <li>• partnership working to develop local policies and initiatives, and with schools</li> <li>• smoking cessation figures</li> <li>• health arrangements for looked after children.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meeting the mental health needs of the most vulnerable children and young people through the CAMHS service.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multi-agency engagement on child protection and for looked after children</li> <li>• restorative and preventative approaches</li> <li>• health and safety arrangements and guidance</li> <li>• the stability of placements for looked after children</li> <li>• standards of practice and support.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• timeliness of initial assessments</li> <li>• timeliness of educational provision for pupils permanently excluded from school.</li> </ul>

<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strategies to address underachievement</li> <li>• knowledge of weaker areas, schools and aspects of performance</li> <li>• recent record on schools in categories of concern</li> <li>• performance and support for looked after children and children with learning disabilities</li> <li>• secondary school performance.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• primary school performance</li> <li>• underperformance by children from black and ethnic minorities</li> <li>• secondary fixed term exclusions</li> <li>• tracking of out-of-school-hours activities and awards.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the work of the youth offending team</li> <li>• use of restorative justice</li> <li>• close tracking and targeted action</li> <li>• traveller education service.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the contribution looked after children make to their reviews.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• partnership working with Connexions and with the local Learning and Skills Council</li> <li>• performance on supporting post-16s in education and employment, including care leavers.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• services for care leavers and 16-25 year olds including supported tenancies and lodgings.</li> </ul>

## Service management

The authority has a strong commitment to ensuring the well-being of every child; this is clearly articulated in the annual report of the Children and Young People's Partnership. The vision, which is supported by schools, is centred on securing the five outcomes for children and young people. The self-assessment and information from inspectorates and government agencies demonstrate that a good range of partnership working is developing across a range of agencies to achieve this vision and to further develop children's trust arrangements. Available data have been analysed and used effectively by the authority to identify priorities and target activities.

The authority has developed appropriate structures and systems to support the implementation of its plans and operates a coherent cycle of planning and performance review to track progress. There is a good focus on prevention. This is evident in the emphasis placed on developing universal services and action such as extended schools, children's centres and common approaches to school exclusions.

The authority's staffing capacity is lean but its resources are used efficiently. Co-operative working between the authority and its partners has led to staffing resources

being pooled in order to deliver agreed priorities and secure greater effectiveness, such as for pupils who might experience difficulties at times of transition. More effective commissioning and quality assurance of services are being secured through joint PCT and authority funding of a key post holder, who will also be developing commissioning in the voluntary, community and private sector.

The council recognises the importance of children and young people, their parents and carers being involved in the planning and review of services. It has made a positive start in engaging them through activities such as restorative justice (working with victims and offenders) and family group conferencing, but recognises the potential for further development.

While improved outcomes are not yet evident in all areas of the authority's work, its current high performance in many areas, its clear self-knowledge and track record, alongside the establishment of new structures and systems, indicate that there is excellent capacity to improve services further.

## **Areas for exploration at the joint area review**

### **Being healthy**

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

- the effectiveness of CAMHS provision.

### **Staying safe**

*Looked after children live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:*

- the impact and effectiveness of the council's measures to manage the influx of unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- the development and impact of the Multi-Agency Team for Children.

### **Enjoying and achieving**

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

- progress in improving standards at Key Stages 1 and 2
- progress in reducing secondary school exclusions.

## **Making a positive contribution**

*Children and young people who are looked after are helped to make a positive contribution:*

- progress on increasing the number of looked after children who contribute to their reviews.

## **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:*

- progress in implementing the 14-19 strategy.

## **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: West Berkshire 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>4</b>

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### 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