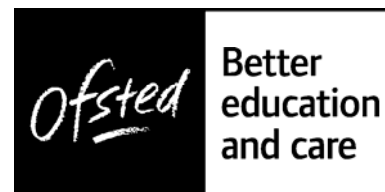


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Chris M Williams
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Williams

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 6 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. There are some particularly good aspects as a result of healthy lifestyles promoted universally through schools. Participation in the Healthy Schools programme is extensive. The council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) have worked in partnership to issue guidance and provide input on substance misuse and smoking cessation to schools and youth services. The PCT monitors the impact of this work on groups of vulnerable children and young people in relation to ethnicity, gender and age. Referrals to Buckinghamshire's Young People's Drugs Service have risen by 25% as the co-ordinated approach, involving 500 staff trained in assessing pupils, have taken effect. Sports participation in schools is satisfactory and the council works with *GO* to provide wider community and disabled sports facilities. Young people have good support for sex and relationships education. The level of teenage pregnancy is below the national average and continues to fall.

The number of social work staff allocated to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAHMS) is equivalent to 4.9 full-time workers, below the average 11.2 in similar councils. The mental health of children and young people is promoted not only through social workers but also through partnership work with health services, providing behaviour consultants and psychology support and nurse counselling services in many schools. The numbers of instances are low but timescales for passing referrals appropriately to CAHMS are not met.

Healthy Bucks tackles health inequality issues including those of looked after children and good support is given to their health needs. The percentage of looked after children having health checks compares favourably with similar authorities.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. However, in 2004/05 a main area for development for the council continued to be the initial response, assessment and planning work with children and families referred to social services. Scoping work undertaken by the Business Support Team (funded jointly by the DfES and the council) in autumn 2004 identified that in a minority of cases this work with service users was still not of a good enough standard.

The council has displayed good senior leadership in addressing this matter in a range of ways including seeking to increase workforce capacity, providing better training and improving operational management. Data for 2004/05 indicate improvements in assessment and care planning for children and families. For example, the percentage of initial assessments completed within seven days of referral, and the percentage of core assessments completed within 35 days of referral, are very much improved over the previous two years. However, the council's performance in both these areas remains below the average for comparable councils. Significant changes have been made to social work and joint working practice, safeguarding policies for schools and inter-agency assessment and referral processes.

The percentage of children on the child protection register not allocated a social worker was 3.7% in 2004/05. This was a great improvement on the 26.4% for 2003/04, but well above the average of 0.3% for similar councils. In 2005/06, the council has plans to continue to improve its performance in this area. The data for 2004/05 for activity within the child protection system indicate that reviewing and managing registration, re-registration and de-registration workflows are of an improving and good standard.

Once looked after children are within the council's system, the prevailing direction of the indicators for 2004/05 is that much of the council's performance is good or very good. The percentage of looked after children with a named qualified social worker is well above the average of similar councils. Placement stability, emphasis on family placements, working to help children leave the looked after children system through adoption, and helping looked after children achieve educational qualifications all show a positive picture. However, the CSCI inspection of the council's own fostering service in February 2005 showed some concerning delays in holding planning meetings, and the effects of high turnover of social workers.

Protection of children with special educational needs and disabilities is under review by the council, supported by commissioned external consultants. The council had kept CSCI well briefed on some related matters.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. With the exception of science at Key Stage 2, attainment in end of key stage tests and examinations is consistently above national averages and those of similar authorities. Some aspects are extremely good as standards are high overall and a broad and innovative curriculum gives many children and young people exciting opportunities to achieve.

The quality of early years care, learning and play is well above national average except in sessional and multiple type settings where standards are in line with the national picture. The quality of funded nursery education enables children to make good progress towards the early learning goals in the Foundation Stage. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are above national averages and statistical neighbours, particularly in reading. The council has improved individual pupil tracking to target support to areas of need so that the impact of such intervention can be measured.

Standards in Key Stages 2 to 4 are consistently above national averages and the highest among the comparator group of councils at Key Stages 3 and 4. Progress between key stages is steady and in the top national quartile from Key Stages 2 to 4. Children's performance in science begins to dip at Key Stage 2 in line with the national trend, although girls are improving faster than boys. The percentage of young people leaving school with at least one GCSE at grade A* to G is among the highest in the country at nearly 97%, including looked after children and those with special educational needs who do not have statements. The percentage of pupils passing five or more A* to C grades at GCSE (nearly 68%) is again well above national averages and statistical neighbours and rising in line with national trends. The percentage of pupils leaving care with at least 1 GCSE at grade A* to G grades is above average. However, the outturn figure for care leavers achieving 5A* to C grades fell significantly in 2004.

The provision of places and admissions policies is satisfactory. Low levels of authorised and unauthorised absence across all phases reflect the priority given by all council services and by heads of schools to attendance and attainment. Non-attendance is highest among black and minority ethnic boys. Looked after children are encouraged to attend well and a third of this group of pupils are satisfied with their education. The number of exclusions is very low in comparison with national and statistical neighbours, helped by managed moves and an admissions panel for hard to place pupils. The provision for young people not in school is very good, pupil referral units are effective and reintegration rates are very good. Traveller children do not have high attendance rates but educational provision is tailored effectively to their needs and was judged as highly satisfactory in the 2004 inspection of the local educational authority

The range of additional activities and opportunities for enrichment is extensive. The creativity of some areas of curriculum development has been praised highly. Children

have access to a wide range of sporting, ecological, leisure and cultural facilities and achieve particularly well in performing music. Looked after children and children with learning difficulties and disabilities are encouraged to take part; new software is being implemented to enable participation to be more effectively monitored.

Six schools are in category of concern, including a special school and three secondary schools identified as having serious weaknesses. Improvement support has enabled three primary schools with serious weaknesses to have the designation removed. Robust plans, including consultancy analysis of special educational needs strategies and more active engagement of schools management groups, are in place to bring the remaining schools back up to acceptable standards of provision.

Specific funding is being used to target support at raising standards for special education needs pupils. Very young children are helped to make a positive start through good special needs standards in early years settings and there is good transition support to mainstream for children with downs syndrome. No children with special needs are excluded from school. Restructuring to reduce the population in special schools, a review of residential placements and making more efficient use of the strengths in mainstream schools is underway. Special needs practice in mainstream schools is effective and compliance with statutory requirements is good. Administration of statement procedures is good.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. Young children get very good support in most early years settings. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered well and freedom from bullying is good or very good in schools, except for a small number of secondary schools.

Young people participate enthusiastically in service and strategic planning and sit on the Corporate Parenting Panel. All services incorporate the views of children and young people in their plans. Young people wrote the *Youth Charter* and helped design the *Young Bucks* Website. In collaboration with the council, Connexions and voluntary organisations, young people set up an achievement award scheme. A wealth of voluntary peer-help and mentoring schemes attract diverse participation, including children and young people who are looked after. New partnership funding has been set up to reach out to black and minority ethnics groups, travellers and children and young people in rural areas but the impact is yet to be seen.

Re-offending rates have declined by 12% in the general population and only 1.8% of looked after children received a final warning, conviction or reprimand. However, the numbers of first-time offenders into the Youth Justice system shows a slight upward trend, against the national downward trend.

A satisfactory 89% of looked after children, including those with special needs and disabilities, contribute to their reviews. Young people are invited to comment on services provided for them. The participation of children with disabilities in play and care settings is promoted well. Pupils with special needs are given good multi-agency support when beginning school and leaving compulsory education.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good. The growth in the number of childcare places is in line with the national increase of about 14% overall. The area trend is away from childminding towards full day care and out of school care to suit local demand. New settings are well prepared to provide good quality care at the time of registration.

Some of the data for 2004/05 indicate levels of access to services by families of children and young people with disabilities which are below the average for similar councils. For example, only 0.5% of children with disabilities benefited from direct payments (compared to 4.4% for comparable councils).

The quality of 14-19 education is good. There are no inadequate sixth forms. Seventy nine percent of students go on to full-time time post-16 studies and the majority of these 18 to 19 year olds progress to higher education with comfortably higher than national average points scores for A and AS level qualifications. Flexible funding in partnership with colleges targets areas of need to provide a wider variety of vocational training opportunities. However groups of pupils identified as underachieving in schools, including young offenders, continue to underachieve post-16.

Youth unemployment is amongst the lowest in the country. The figure for over 16s not-in-education, employment or training (NEET) is 3.8%, However, the NEET figure for young offenders it is 34.9%, just below the national figure for this group. Coordination with Connexions is providing an improved service and more placements for young offenders.

Care leavers benefit from effective partnership work. The percentage of care leavers engaged in employment, training or education at 19, although it is lower than the proportion for all other young people in the area, compares very favourably with the national average.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in Healthy Schools • health of looked after children • reduction in teenage conception rates 	<p><i>Being healthy.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAHMS waiting times • set clearer targets and outcomes for smoking prevention.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in sports in schools. 	
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joint working and assessment arrangements between social services, education, health • sharing good practice between agencies, schools and voluntary sector partners • the number of looked after children placed for adoption • good demonstration of leadership in implementing changes and securing improvements following the BST. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safeguarding procedures in schools • the role of head teachers in special schools • meeting time targets for initial and core assessments • ensuring all child protection cases are allocated to a qualified social worker and additional management measures to safeguard vulnerable children are fully implemented.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards in the Foundation Stage and all key stages, particularly in the secondary phase • support for improvement is targeted well • planning, monitoring and review processes • innovation and effectiveness in aspects of curriculum development • low absence rates for most pupils • low exclusion rates. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue restructuring of provision for SEN • the achievement of specific hard-to-engage groups • attendance of identified groups of pupils.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good support for very young children in day care and for pupils to behave well in schools • good support for children with special educational needs at times of transition • impressive array of consultation and involvement • reduction in re-offending. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging specific groups of children and young people who are hard to reach • reduction of first time offending.

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a high proportion of 16 plus go on to employment, education or training • high levels of attainment post 16 • support to care leavers. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • youth offenders in employment, education or training • continue to target post 16 progression for under achieving groups in school.
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Service management

Strategies are on course for the delivery of unified children and young people’s plan incorporating the education plan by April 2006. The senior management team is fully committed to the improvement agenda and is actively supported by elected members. Within the children and young people’s strategic partnership two agencies have been designated to lead on developing plans for each of the outcome areas. This ensures high-level commitment at multi-agency level and encourages solutions that cut across traditional sector boundaries. A conference has been organised to bring together voluntary agencies within the county. Last year’s Performance Review Report recommended that the council work more closely with health partners at the early stages of service improvement plans. There is evidence that initiatives have been brought together through pooled resources and co-location although it is unclear whether health partners have been effectively engaged.

Strategies are linked to the analysis of need across the county. Improving outcomes for children and young people is a clear priority. The proportion of the council’s budget allocated to social care is increasing year on year, the 2003-04 allocation was over 13%.

Work undertaken by the Business Support Team has begun to address team management and the quality assurance of social work practice although there is still some way to go. The recruitment, retention and training of the social workers remain a challenge for the organisation. Innovative responses by the council include a graduate sponsorship scheme where trainee social workers are supported financially as an inducement to work for Buckinghamshire once they have qualified. In addition, links have been made in Canada, where the social work training is similar to the UK. Twelve Canadian staff were recruited in 2004 with a similar number offered contracts in 2005. These approaches will take time to affect significantly the current position of a heavy dependence on agency staff. The impact on allocation of the most vulnerable cases and timely referral is yet to be seen.

In education, the recruitment and retention of specialist teachers of mathematics and science is a priority. The council is also building capacity across all outcomes through engagement with the voluntary sector to develop better inter-agency working.

The council has invested considerably in education strategy. Following the last Ofsted and Audit Commission Local Educational Authority report consultants were brought in particularly to advise on special educational needs budget and strategy, gaining the commitment of all stakeholders in plans for improvement. Political will is now focussed, with better understanding of the specific issues by the portfolio holders. Strategy is being revised rapidly, with a move to inclusion, making special educational needs a stronger feature of school partnership. Already the special educational needs budget is better aligned to strategy. It is too early to measure the impact of these changes on outcomes.

The council has good capacity to further improve services for children and young people. It has set some ambitious targets to improve outcomes in specific areas of need, for instance in the employment, education and training of young offenders and in stability in foster placements where targets this year have not been met. Although there are clear examples of high achievement in education and of successful strategies which support young people in achieving economic well-being, there remain a number of areas where the impact of re-shaped strategies is not yet evident.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

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

- CAHMS capacity and waiting times

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse or neglect is minimised:

- recruitment and retention of staff as they impact on assessment time targets and the allocation of all vulnerable children cases
- child protection procedures following external consultants report on Residential Special Schools.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities live in safe environments and are protected from abuse or exploitation:

- implementation of the consultant report on education and the role of head teachers in special schools.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- implementation of restructuring provision for SEN.

Making a positive contribution

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

- engaging specific groups of children and young people who are hard to reach.

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:

- targeting of specific groups for educational achievement, employment or training.

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

Cc: Ms Rita Lally, Director of Children & Young People

Cc: Sue Imbriano - Strategic Director of Schools

APA final judgements 2005: Buckinghamshire County 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	2
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
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

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