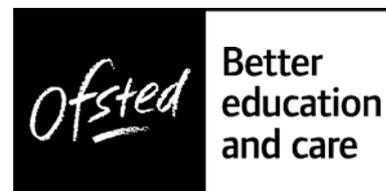




Making Social Care
Better for People



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Ms Lisa Christensen
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1 December 2005

Dear Ms Christensen

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 1 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. Significant investment in the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) team has resulted in referrals being dealt with quickly and effectively. The number of full time equivalent social workers employed or working closely with multi-disciplinary CAMHS teams is well above comparators. The health of looked after children has been consistently very well monitored. The authority has recently appointed a nurse with responsibility for this area to ensure the high level of monitoring is maintained. The council's commitment to improving the health of young people is demonstrated through innovative work to prevent substance misuse which specifically targets young people at risk.

Teenage pregnancies are in line with regional and national averages but vary considerably in different parts of the county. They have been reduced through good partnership work in Yarmouth, involving the Primary Care Trust General Practitioners and the District Council, making services easily accessible to young people. However, this model of good practice has not been consistently rolled out across the county as a whole.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good and have significantly improved in the last year. Concerns identified in last years annual performance review about the quality and timeliness of assessments, the timeliness of reviews and the number of young people on the child protection register who did not have a qualified social workers have all been effectively addressed. A workforce development strategy has been put in place to manage current and predicted difficulties with recruitment and retention and is beginning to have a positive impact. Staff turnover and sickness levels have reduced and the number of permanent social workers has been increased. Placement stability, fostering and adoption services continue to be good. Partnership working is much more effective: for example, the area child protection committee, the voluntary sector forum, and the CAMHS partnership board, have all improved outcomes for young people.

Although there has been good progress in improving the timeliness of child protection conferences the management of the child protection registration process requires further improvement. The number of children on the register and the number of initial child protection conferences and re-registrations are well above those for similar authorities. De-registration from the child protection register is also high. Child protection reviews have shown a slight improvement but have not yet reached the 100% target. All schools have a designated person for child protection. Training for teachers on child protection is good and non-attendance at training is monitored and followed up.

The number of looked after children and related referrals within the local authority is high which has a significant impact on budgets for children's social care. Strategies have been put in place to address this situation, including the provision of a wider range of support systems, targeting teams where referrals are high and the implementation of more preventative measures. However the budget for preventative services is considerably lower than national averages and similar authorities.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall although in some areas the rate of improvement has been slow. The quality of early years provision is satisfactory overall. Although there has been a rapid expansion in provision over the last two years with a focus on improving capacity in areas of high social need the authority recognises places are not always easily accessible in the more rural parts of the county. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are in line with national averages and statistical neighbours. Rates of improvement are above statistical neighbours, and for writing and mathematics above the national average.

Standards at Key Stages 2,3,4 and 5 are largely in line with national averages but rates of improvement of standards are inconsistent across the key stages. At Key Stage 2

rates of improvement for English and mathematics are above national and statistical neighbours, while science is just below. Results in 2004 showed a downward trend in all areas which provisional data indicates will be reversed in 2005. The rate of improvement of 5A*-C grades at GCSE is consistently below the national average. Standards at Key Stage 3 are the strongest and progress between Key Stages 2 and 3 is good. The authority recognises the need to improve attainment and has strengthened its policies and procedures to support and challenge schools. It is now better able to respond to the varying patterns of performance of its schools.

The proportion of looked after children gaining one or more GCSE has declined and is below the national average and that of similar authorities. Systems for monitoring and analysing the achievements of looked after children have been strengthened and the Local Public Sector Agreement includes challenging targets for improvement in this area. Support for, and the achievement of, children and young people with sensory impairment is good.

Authorised absences in both primary and secondary schools and for looked after children are high and above national and statistical neighbours for primary schools and well above for secondary schools. The authority has published and actively promoted an attendance strategy and provisional figures for the current academic year indicate it is bringing about an improvement. Rates of permanent exclusion in both primary and secondary schools have been consistently low both in relation to national averages and statistical neighbours. However, the authority acknowledges the majority of excluded children and young people do not receive the statutory number of hours of education.

Support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is effective. The speed of removal from a specific category is above the national average. Effective intervention strategies have resulted in a reduction in the number of schools identified as causing concern over the last year.

Participation by young people in activities provided by the council's youth service are good. Achievement is also good and most young people, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make significant progress in their personal and social development and in learning new skills.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. Young people are involved in planning, implementation and evaluation of services and there is a well established group of looked after children who advise the council and other bodies. A significant number of young people contribute to their reviews and are happy with the services that are provided. The youth offending team continues to perform highly.

The proportion of looked after children who receive final warnings or convictions remains high although it has improved from last year. The council has identified that many of the offences were committed in care homes, so is now adopting a new process of mediation and discussion. The director is also meeting with the youth offending team and the crime and disorder reduction team to ensure effective partnership work takes place.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. Although there are weaknesses in the achievement of looked after children at 16 all care leavers have Pathway Plans which are regularly reviewed. The number of children leaving care who are in education, employment or training at 19 has improved and is in line with the national average and similar authorities. The proportion who progress to higher education is good.

Overall the quality of education provided for 14-19 year olds is satisfactory. The proportion of young people aged 16-19 who are in learning has improved and is in line with the national average. The local authority works in partnership with the local Learning and Skills Council and Connexions Service to provide clear strategic direction for the development of 14-19 education. A curriculum entitlement strategy has been developed and will be fully implemented by 2008. The 14-19 rural pathfinder has successfully increased employer engagement in provision in the west of the county. New locality planning arrangements have recently been established and are in the process of developing three year plans to implement the curriculum entitlement in their areas. The curriculum and its configuration is satisfactory overall but curriculum mapping at a local level is underdeveloped. Provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and vulnerable young people has not yet been integrated into the overall strategy for 14-19 education. School improvement strategies have been improved at Key Stage 4 but are less robust for school sixth forms.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring of the health of looked after children • levels of investment in CAMHS and good partnership working. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rate of reduction in teenage pregnancies.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • management of child protection cases • improved child protection processes and outcomes • stability of placements and the quality of fostering and adoption services. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuing high numbers of looked after children and referrals • management of the child protection registration process.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • levels of permanent exclusions in both primary and secondary schools • rates of improvement at Key Stage 1 and English at Key Stage 3 • participation and achievement in youth service activities • support for and achievement of children and young people with sensory impairment. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of provision and attainment for excluded children and young people • consistency of achievement and rates of improvement at Key Stages 2 and 4. • achievement of looked after children • levels of authorised absence in primary and secondary schools and for looked after children.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young people's involvement in planning, review, assessing services and advising the council • high performing youth offending team. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of looked after children who receive final warnings and convictions.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engagement of employers through 14-19 rural pathfinder • improved percentage looked after children in education, employment and training at 19. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of curriculum mapping • integration of provision for young people with learning difficulties into overarching strategy for 14-19 education • robustness of school improvement strategies for school sixth forms.

Service management

The local authority is strongly committed to improving outcomes for children's services. Its well-established record of partnership provides a sound platform for responding to the 2004 Children's Act agenda. Comprehensive needs analyses underpin plans for education and children's social care. Priorities for improvement are appropriate and shared with relevant partners, although targets for improvement within plans are not consistently sharp. Significant needs analysis work is currently being carried out with partners to inform the production of a single children and people's plan for 2006. Young people are involved in planning, implementation and evaluation of the council's services. The council identifies budget management and control as being a strong feature of its operation. There has been a recent review of budget issues underpinned by a related action plan. Nevertheless, commitments to increase spending for children's service as a whole sit within a context of the council facing acute financial pressures and identifying a need to make savings of £12 million pounds in the overall budget in the current financial year. Funding for education is in line with statistical neighbours although below the national average. In 2003/04 there was a real term reduction in the funding to schools resulting in a loss of teaching posts and an increase in the pupil teacher ratio. The authority is supporting 17% of schools in balancing their budgets by 2006. Spending on the youth service is low. It is significantly below the national average and plans to improve spending in this area are modest. Spending on preventative services in children's social care is considerably lower than in similar councils and is the lowest in the eastern region. Consequently there are a high number of children looked after in Norfolk which impacts on overall costs of placements which are also high. The effective use of funding in this area has been identified by the authority as a priority area for review.

A clear workforce development strategy has been developed to manage current and predicted difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff in both the education service and children's social care. There is a clear recruitment and retention strategy for social work staff which includes secondment onto professional training courses for unqualified staff and overseas recruitment. The authority is a significant provider of initial teacher training resulting in more than 200 new teachers being trained in its schools each year.

The county council monitors the performance of its services closely. The improved use of data and performance management has brought about a significant improvement in the quality of children's social care over the last year. Although the use of data and performance management is good in most aspects of the education service, in some areas rates of improvement have been slow.

At this stage the council has a good capacity to improve but this is dependant on improvements in children's social care being sustained over the next year, increased rates of improvement in aspects of education and corporate leaders ensuring services to children are appropriately resourced.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy life-styles are promoted for children and young people:

- Impact of strategies to reduce teenage pregnancies.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

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

- Reductions in the high number of looked after children
- The high number of initial child protection conferences, re-registrations and de-registrations.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- Whether strengthened procedures for monitoring and challenging schools have affected rates of improvement at Key Stages 2,3 and 4.

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

- Access of excluded children and young people to education for the statutory number of hours.

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

- Improvements in the attainment of 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:

- Progress made in implementing coherent the 14-19 strategy to ensure high quality outcomes and provision for all young people.

Service Management

Capacity is used efficiently and effectively and is developed to deliver ambitions, priorities and value for money:

- Effectiveness of use made of financial resources for children's services.

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: Norfolk 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.	2
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
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