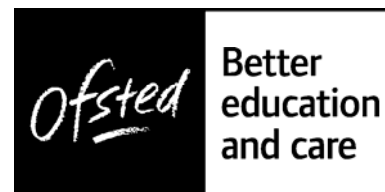


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Making Social Care  
Better for People



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**1 December 2005**

Dear Ms Absalom

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY 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 with a universal healthy living strategy overseen by multi-purpose groups and excellent targeted provision aimed at such groups as looked after children. The number of looked after children receiving regular health checks is well above that of local comparator authorities.

There is a successful Healthy Schools programme, sports participation initiatives and some innovative projects providing education about drug use and mental health problems. However there is also recognition of the need to reach children with mental health problems in the wider community and initiatives are being taken including the development of an under 5's service and the provision of 24 hour access.

Similarly there is an acknowledged need to develop 'lower threshold services' for children on the fringe of mainstream and / or specialist services, especially those with disabilities, Special Educational Needs and emotional and behavioural difficulties. 15 out of 16 Secondary schools access sexual health education from the school nursing team and the incidence of teenage pregnancy has fallen by 6% overall since 2001.

## Staying safe

The general level of mainstream provision is satisfactory and there is a high standard of targeted provision particularly in relation to ensuring the wellbeing of looked after children and children on the Child Protection Register (CPR).

There is good inter-agency collaboration through the Area Child Protection Committee and the development of multi agency services to safeguard children in Bexley. Child Protection services are also strong and indicators show a fall in the number of repeat referrals and a continuing good performance with regard to initial core assessments completed to timescale.

The council has been proactive in reducing the number of looked after children through means such as adoption, which this year increased by 8.6%. However this has created a relatively older and more complex group of looked after children which contributes to relatively poor performance on indicators associated with stability, crime and education.

All children on the CPR continue to be allocated to a social worker and all Child Protection reviews have been held on time. A good quality assurance system is in place and Bexley is working towards meeting all standards set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'. Good joint working is established across agencies including through the Complex Cases Panel, the dedicated looked after children education team and targeted looked after children services provided by the Youth Offending Team and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

Priorities for the coming year include the professional development of foster carers to better meet the needs of more complex children and those of black and minority ethnic and disabled children. An area for development is services to ensure that children at lower thresholds of need access early intervention.

Although mainstream provision meets the requirements in terms of policies and procedures in place to safeguard children, such as CRB checks and child protection procedures at school, a more proactive approach is required and a new post has been funded to take forward the safeguarding agenda in schools and the monitoring of GP uptake of child protection training.

Initiatives have also been introduced to take forward a strategy to support schools in combating racism and bullying. There are now safer schools officers in five secondary schools across the borough.

## Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are generally good. The overall quality of early years provision is satisfactory and supports children to meet the early learning goals. Inspection has found no unacceptable provision and the authority is working hard to improve areas where some weaknesses were identified. A dedicated advisory team is now in place to work with providers and there is improved sharing of good practice. Results at the end of key stage one are in line with national averages. The results in writing have fallen below those of statistical neighbours and the council has identified this as an area for improvement.

Schools receiving targeted Key Stage 2 support have made good gains in attainment overall. Standards in English are above the national average and in line with statistical neighbours but there is underperformance in mathematics and science. In order to address this issue, the authority has worked with schools to improve their data analysis and target setting, it has increased the level of support available and schools are now clustered to work together to share good practice.

At Key Stage 3 there is a rising trend in results in English and Mathematics. English has performed above statistical neighbours for the last two years and mathematics results were slightly above in 2003-04. Science at Key Stage 3 is in line with national averages but results dipped in 2003-4 and the authority has identified science as under-performing in key stages 3 and 4 in some schools. GCSE results are good. There has been an upward trend in the number of pupils gaining at least 5 A\*-C grades to a point where results were slightly above statistical neighbours in 2003-04. This marks considerable progress since the last inspection of the local education authority. The proportion of looked after children gaining one or more GCSE in 2003-04 was high but this is predicted to fall in 2004-05 and the council has identified the attainment of looked after children as an area for further development. A multi-agency approach is being taken to meet the complex needs of a small cohort of older looked after children and customised courses are being developed where appropriate.

Attendance has improved overall, including for looked after children, and is generally in line with statistical neighbours. However, there was a rise in unauthorised absences in some schools in 2003-04. The rate of exclusions has been rising and they are above average in both primary and secondary provision. The authority has introduced more detailed monitoring of exclusions, a number of strategies are in place to address the issue and there appears to be improvement in 2004-05. This is part of the authority's wider plans to work with schools to develop a more inclusive approach. Budgets are being restructured to give schools more direct responsibility for inclusion within a framework of central monitoring of the progress of pupils with special educational needs.

There has been significant improvement in the authority's school intervention strategies since the last inspection, with more targeted work and better joint working with schools to analyse the causes of under-achievement and develop improvement plans. The authority currently has no schools identified as causing serious concern by Ofsted; two primary schools are in the category of having serious weaknesses and the council has identified four schools as causing concern.

There are a number of opportunities for young people to engage in informal learning and leisure activities. An increasing number are taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award and gaining accreditation for out of school learning. There has been a significant increase in weekend and after school clubs that provide inclusive opportunities for disabled children.

### **Making a positive contribution**

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall and particularly good for looked after children.

The authority has developed a number of initiatives to engage young people in constructive activities. A new Youth Engagement Service is in place and the authority is co-ordinating services and resources to focus on hotspot areas of youth disorder. There has been effective work with other agencies, including projects with the police to involve young people in sporting activities and the making of a film on anti-social disorder. The Youth Offending Team has been strengthened to give greater emphasis to education and realistic targets have been set to increase the number of young offenders participating in education or training. The number of first offenders reduced during 2004.

The authority successfully engages with children and young people more widely in a number of ways. Each ward is represented in the Bexley Children's Parliament and a Youth council was established in January 2005. There is also a Disabled Young Peoples' forum and an Asian youth forum. The authority has recognised the need for better strategic co-ordination of its activities to involve young people and a new Participation Officer post started in April 2005.

The majority of young people are given good support in managing changes in their lives and particularly good attention is given to the needs of looked after children. The proportion of young people in care who contribute their opinions at reviews is very high. There are effective advocacy arrangements for looked after children and a support group for 5-11 year olds. An education liaison officer supports their transition from primary to secondary school. Care leavers are represented on a number of working groups, including the corporate parenting forum. They are trained to participate in interviews of social work staff and to act as mentors for younger looked

after children. A care leavers' user group inputs into service development and produces a newsletter for looked after children.

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

Outcomes in this area are good. Staying on rates are rising and the number of young people not engaged in education, training or employment has reduced to 7.7%. The proportion of care leavers in education or employment at 19 is generally good. A transition worker is in place to help disabled young people remain in education or employment.

Overall, the quality of education provided for 14-19 year olds is good with average point scores gained by young people staying on in the sixth form being in line with statistical neighbours. The authority has successfully tackled the weakness of uneconomic sixth forms identified in the previous LEA inspection through collaboration and rationalisation. There is now a catholic sixth form college and a partnership between three other schools to create better choice for students. Further work is being undertaken to consider consortium arrangements in the south of the borough. A post 16 opportunities brochure has been published for September 2005 to give students a clearer overview of courses available to them.

The 14-19 strategy is identified as a priority and schools are working to develop more vocational opportunities, including level one courses. An effective partnership approach has developed, with links to further education, training providers and local employers. School involvement in the Increasing Flexibility project has grown significantly and a variety of delivery methods is in place to meet the growing level of demand. The authority is working closely with the Local Learning and Skills Council in analysing employment trends to inform curriculum planning. Further development of provision is planned, including areas being explored by the Alternative Curriculum Group, which includes the Prince's Trust, Bexley Training, the college and the Youth Service

## SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• numbers of looked after children receiving health checks</li> <li>• successful Healthy Schools programme.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development of mental health services for children in wider community</li> <li>• develop 'lower threshold services' for children on fringe of mainstream / specialist services.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Protection Services</li> <li>• proactive reduction of looked after children numbers</li> <li>• good joint working.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to early intervention for children at lower threshold of need</li> <li>• professional development of foster carers.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• generally good levels of attainment in secondary, with above average GCSE results</li> <li>• no schools in special measures.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• science provision and mathematics at Key Stage 2</li> <li>• level of exclusions.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good examples of initiatives to engage children and young people, including vulnerable groups.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development of an overall strategy and strengthening of youth services.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rise in staying on rates and decline in not in education, employment and training.</li> <li>• generally positive outcomes for young people staying on in sixth forms.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further development of 14-19 strategy to ensure appropriate curriculum for all.</li> </ul>

## Service management

The authority has worked well with relevant parties to analyse need and set appropriate priorities and challenging targets. Children's services are high on the council's agenda and there has been early restructuring of services around the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.

The strategy of engaging partners in service delivery developments has been central to the improvements in joint working between social services and the Education service in the past year and the widespread consultation on Achievement for All engaged the

school community in particular in focusing on the need for action in delivery around SEN, Behaviour and the 14-19 Strategy.

Similarly the development of school based integrated teams is being progressed through a project which is linked to the Institute of Education and involves schools and health and social care professionals.

The last CPA Corporate Assessment recognised Performance Management as an area of strength for the council which has now merged Children and Young People's Social Services and Education and Lifelong Services under a single Director of Children's Services. This is a significant step towards mainstreaming the planning, commissioning and delivery of multi-agency services and integrating the senior management structures of the Education and Children's Social Services.

The Children's Trust agenda is now being driven forward by the Children's Trust Executive Board which has wide representation and is actively committed to achieve targets set for delivering the Children & Young People's Strategic Plan and the formal establishment of the Trust by October 2006.

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

### **Being healthy**

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

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

- progress in developing 'lower threshold services' for children on the fringe of mainstream and / or specialist services.

### **Staying safe**

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

- access to early intervention of children at lower thresholds of need.

## **Enjoying and achieving**

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

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

- to what extent the LA has progressed its Achievement for All strategy to address issues around exclusion and to develop its provision for SEN pupils.

## **Making a positive contribution**

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

- progress in achieving a coherent strategy to involve YP
- further development of the Youth Service provision.

## **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:*

- the extent to which the sixth form re-organisation and the 14-19 partnership approach has extended curriculum opportunities.



## 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: London Borough of Bexley

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>4</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>4</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