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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Christie

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 4 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information that 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 adequate and the authority has identified key priorities for action in order to secure the necessary improvements. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through the schools' participation in the National Healthy Schools Standard and the authority is confident that half of the schools will have achieved the standard by 2006 and so meet national standards. The quality of sports provision in schools is good while children and young people with mental health needs, including those in the youth justice system, have good access to support from Child and Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

The incidence of teenage pregnancy is rising above the national trend and the authority has developed a Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Strategy with support from the DfES. This strategy underpins the provision of services that have been agreed with the Primary Care Trust. In addition, the authority has established a Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board.

Health checks for looked after children remain below the outer London average. This is largely attributable to the age profile of the council's looked after children; over half of these young people were aged 13 years and over when they became looked after and several were unaccompanied asylum seekers. The authority is working in partnership with the Primary Care Trust both to improve access to health checks and the attendance rates of the young people at medical appointments.

Staying safe

Child protection services are well managed, with strong partnerships and joint working arrangements. This is reflected in a significant reduction in the number of children on the Child Protection Register, allied to the fact that there has not been an increase in the number of re-registrations.

The stability of placements for looked after children remains strong, and performance has further improved since last year. The authority cites the age profile of its looked after children population as significant in that older children in semi-independent accommodation are more likely to experience a greater number of moves.

There is a mixed picture with regard to assessments. The number of assessments initiated within seven days has decreased, whilst the percentage completed within 35 days has increased considerably since last year. The authority attributes this to its revised definition of initial assessments that is more consistent with national definitions.

Although 50 per cent of children are placed for adoption within twelve months of the best interest decision; the proportion adopted from care are small and are well below the outer London average. A strategy has been developed to increase the numbers of looked after children who are adopted.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes are generally good in this area but there are some issues for improvement. The authority has an effective needs analysis and is able to direct support to areas where it is most needed. For example it has identified shortcomings in the provision for early years and is taking steps to improve this through more effective training and support.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are in line with national averages and there has been some improvement in reading, writing and maths. Effective support has contributed to good results for Black African and Caribbean heritage pupils. The progress made between Key Stages 1 and 2 is good and by the end of Key Stage 2 standards in maths are above both national averages and those achieved in similar councils. Standards in English are in line with national averages and comparator councils. Standards in science are below both comparators. Improvements at Key Stage 3 have brought results closer to national averages and the rate of improvement is above that nationally. However, although there has been some improvement in achievements for pupils from diverse cultural groups in this key stage, it is below the council average and the good standards in Key Stage 1 have not been maintained.

Progress between Key Stage 3 and 4 is very good and the number of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE is in line with national percentages and well above the proportion in similar authorities. It is a similar picture for pupils gaining one or more A* to G grades. However, only a small number of looked after children sat examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 and there has been a reduction in the numbers achieving one or more GCSEs. This is below the national average.

Attendance figures have remained static in recent years and unauthorised absence remains below the national average in secondary schools and in line in primary. Authorised absence is above the national average in primary and in line with national averages in secondary schools. However, the council has developed a broad range of strategies aimed at improving these figures; including both support and enforcement. The impact of these actions is not yet producing improved attendance. The rate of exclusions from secondary schools is very high and there are a disproportionate number of boys from black African or Caribbean heritage represented in the figures. The authority is extending its provision for excluded pupils and is placing the emphasis on reintegration. Half of the pupils excluded in Key Stage 3 are successfully returned to school. Support for schools placed in Ofsted formal categories is good and schools achieving below their floor targets are given additional support.

The council has provided effective support to young people in the youth justice system and the number of young offenders, in employment, education or training is above national figures. The most recent inspection of the Youth Service in December 2004 found it to be inadequate and providing poor value for money. There is an action plan and both elected members and senior officers monitor progress on this regularly.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making through well established groups. They are increasingly involved in evaluating the quality of provision but the impact of this on future planning is not yet clear. Schools have developed policies on securing the views of those with learning difficulties and disabilities and 80% of looked after children communicated their views at annual reviews. Additional support is provided when these children change from primary to secondary school.

The quality of pastoral support is good in the majority of schools and the help given to young people supports them in managing change. Although the percentage of young offenders who are under supervision in education, employment and training is above the outer London average, the proportion of first time offenders is increasing. However, figures from the Youth Justice Board show a rate of decrease higher than that achieved across London. The percentage of looked after children who have received final warnings, reprimands or corrections has decreased since last year, but remains above both the outer London and national averages.

Achieving economic well-being

The authority with its partners has revised Brent’s 14-19 structures to ensure a more strategic response and it is not yet possible to assess the impact of this. Standards are rising in sixth forms and the average points’ score at Key Stage 5 has improved and is in line with similar councils. A high percentage of care leavers are engaged in education, employment or training at 19.

There has been a decrease in the number of pathway plans for young people leaving care whilst planning for young people with disabilities has improved. Almost all young people with disabilities or special educational needs have transition plans and 72% are in education or training. A high number of children with disabilities are accessing council services which are good. However, the take up of Direct Payments by parents of children with disabilities remains low.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of healthy lifestyles through support for schools • the work of CAMHS. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaborative work to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancy.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child protection • stability of placements of looked after children. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initial assessment timescales • number of adoptions of looked after children.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress at Key Stages 3 and 4 • standards at Key Stage 4 • support for schools in Ofsted categories of concern. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing rates of exclusions from secondary schools • improving proportions of Looked After Children gaining one or more GCSEs • improving outcomes from the Youth Service.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of young offenders in education, employment and training. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of first time offenders.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the percentage of care leavers and young people with disabilities in education, employment and training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take up of Direct Payments by parents of children with disabilities.

Service management

The day of the APA meeting coincided with the launch of the new Children's and Families Department. There is evidence of strong corporate and elected member support, with a Corporate Policy Team and Scrutiny Committee. Last year the former Social Services Department delivered a balanced budget and new IT systems linked to client data, financial data and performance management systems have now been effectively implemented.

There has been a good investment in staff training and the council now spends a greater percentage of its annual budget on training than comparator councils.

Sickness absence rates have reduced a little over the past year.

The council has collaborated with relevant partners in analysing needs and setting targets for improvement. There is strong member leadership and support with increased investment in Children's Services.

The Children and Families Department has a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses. This is demonstrated by both education and social care in the self assessment.

The rate of absence and sickness amongst social care staff is low and there has been a high level of investment in their training. The percentage of those achieving PQ or PQ1 is high which indicates a high level of investment in training.

There are sound performance management systems in place throughout the council. It is not yet clear how the new information technology systems will be integrated in the new department but currently both are fit for purpose.

The council has a good and promising capacity to improve further.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy lifestyles are promoted for children and young people:

- the rate of teenage pregnancy
- health checks for looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- the high rate of exclusions from secondary schools.

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

- raising the attainment of children and young people who are looked after.

All children and young people can access the range of recreational and voluntary learning provision:

- outcomes from youth service activity.

Achieving economic well-being

Action is taken to ensure that 14-19 education is planned and delivered in a coordinated way:

- the impact of the revised structures on 14 to 19 education.

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 Brent

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	3
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 Social Care judgements use CSCI's descriptors as follows:

LSIF Ratings	Local Services Inspectorate Forum (LSIF) Descriptors	CSCI RATINGS Serving People Well	CAPACITY TO IMPROVE DESCRIPTOR
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Overall serving people well	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Serving most people well	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Serving some people well	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Not serving people well	Inadequate