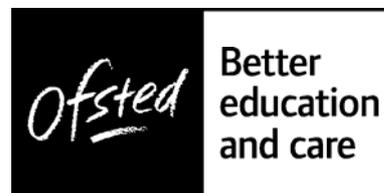


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr David Lund
Director of Education and Children's Services
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Lund

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 27 June 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

The evidence shows a mixed picture of improvement on outcomes for children. While healthy initiatives in schools and the health needs of looked after children are good and improving, the outcomes are poor in relation to teenage pregnancy, provision of mental health services and substance misuse.

All schools have signed up to the healthy schools initiative though half still have no action plan and participation in sport is good in secondary schools and, in the main, very good in primary.

The incidence of teenage pregnancy is very high and has continued to increase over an eight-year period despite a thorough and comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem. On the basis of current progress, it appears unlikely that the council will meet its 2010 target for reduction in conception rates. The council is committed, together with partners in the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP), to improve these outcomes. It is acknowledged that a significant cultural change is required in order to make any real impact and the Blackpool Masterplan, linked to the regeneration of Blackpool, is a key influencing factor.

The council has significantly increased the number of social workers linked to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) from three to nine, but despite this, waiting times for the service remain too long. The council considers that there will be

some positive impact on the service as the new recruits are trained, although difficulties particularly at tier four of the service persist. Good partnership working has been established with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and a recent agreement has been reached to fund an additional consultant. It is acknowledged that responsibility for CAMHS is shared between the Council and Health, but the council must be vigilant in monitoring the impact of the proposed improvements to the service on outcomes for children and young people.

The council's performance in meeting the health needs of looked after children has improved from 'acceptable' to 'good'.

The council reports a higher than average number of hospital admissions linked to substance misuse, particularly of alcoholism in children aged 10 to 14. This has been identified as a priority in the Children and Young People's Plan and the substance misuse strategy will be carried forward through the CYPSP.

Agreement has been reached between the council and the PCT for a joint funded post of Assistant Director of Health for the Children and Young People's Department. It is anticipated that the establishment of this post will secure improved joint working with health authorities and impact positively on the health issues identified.

Overall the council has devised a number of strategies to improve health outcomes for children and young people. The impact of the implementation of these strategies now needs careful monitoring.

Staying safe

Significant progress has been made by the council in this area and outcomes are satisfactory overall, although there continue to be weaknesses in the front line service.

There are good indications of improvements in a number of key areas relating to child protection work: 100% of children on the child protection register are reviewed within timescale; 100% of children on the register are allocated a social worker; low re-referral rates on the register and low number of de-registrations where the child has been on the register for more than two years. These features show improved child care practice.

However, there has been a significant increase in referral rates, with an increased percentage of initial assessments undertaken. This has had an impact on the percentage of assessments undertaken within seven working days of referral. There has been a reduction from 59.9% in 2003/04 to an outturn of 43% in the current year (compared to an average of 62.4% in the comparator group). Whilst the council expresses confidence in prioritising referrals and minimising risk, further work is needed to reduce the response time at the frontline of the service. There has been a

significant increase in the percentage of core assessments undertaken within 35 working days (53.1%), although this is below the average of the comparator group (73.2%). It is anticipated that the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework in April together with further work with schools to agree thresholds for referrals will reduce the workload of frontline staff. The council have also secured regeneration funding to provide multi-agency intensive support to the most vulnerable families.

The percentage of looked after children with a named qualified social worker is low and the forecast of 80%, for the following year, is low compared with the comparator group. The council have clarified that all looked after children are allocated a social worker, although some are unqualified, and the council are aware that this situation must be carefully monitored.

The council are continuing to work to ensure the long-term placement stability of looked after children. Outcomes for children are better than the performance indicator would suggest. This is because some children and young people included in the indicator have essentially remained with the same foster parent for more than two years with only short breaks in continuity, and a number of children and young people on care orders are placed with parents.

Whilst the council identify high numbers of children placed in other authorities, the majority of these are placed within Lancashire and therefore remain relatively close to their own neighbourhood. The council is aware of the pressures these placements put on its budget and will continue to build on recent successes by undertaking reviews to ensure that, whenever possible and appropriate, children and young people are placed within the council boundaries in less costly placements.

Enjoying and achieving

The outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall and good in some areas. The foundation stage profile data suggests that children in Blackpool begin school from a very low baseline. The targeting of resources and innovative projects in the early years is successfully counteracting this difficulty. Childcare provision is sufficient to meet demand and the quality is good. Provision in nursery schools is similarly good.

Attainment at Key Stage 1 is unsurprisingly lower than national averages but is comparable to statistical neighbours. Very good progress is made between Key Stages 1 and 2 and, although results remain slightly lower than the national average, the rate of improvement particularly in mathematics and science show an above average trend. The percentage of pupils achieving level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2 is well above average in all three subjects.

Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 are below national average and statistical neighbours. However, the rate of improvement at Key Stage 3 is in line with national improvements for English and well above for mathematics and science. The council has given high priority to raising attainment at Key Stage 4 and identified accurately the target groups on which to focus. The underachievement of girls is a significant issue. A collaborative research project with the University of Liverpool is underway to identify reasons for underperformance of girls and to provide a strategy to tackle the problem.

The good practice in addressing the high levels of pupil mobility is beginning to impact positively on raising achievement. Nevertheless, the effect of high transience lowers the outcomes for pupils at all key stages. The council analyses data effectively and makes good use of the information, for example it can demonstrate that in English at the end of Key Stage 2, 77.3% of stable pupils achieve level 4, compared to 61.4% of mobile pupils. At Key Stage 4, 41% of stable pupils achieved five A* to C grades at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), compared to 22% of mobile pupils.

A range of strategies are in place to tackle underachievement across all key stages but with a particular focus at Key Stage 4. The federation of secondary schools and colleges is a particularly strong example of the commitment to improve the 14 to 19 curriculum, to raise standards and improve staying on rates.

As a result of effective targeted support for children who are looked after, there has been a 10% increase in take-up of examinations at Key Stage 4. The number achieving at least one GCSE has increased to 61% although none achieved five A* to C grades. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is good. The use of P-scales to monitor progress for those working towards level 1 of the National Curriculum is well established in special schools. The data show clear gains in learning for those pupils.

Attendance is below national averages in both primary and secondary schools and similar to statistical neighbours. However, the trend from 2002-05 shows significant improvement across most schools and is well above national rates of improvement. The council uses a range of strategies to counteract high levels of authorised absence, for example, increasing truancy sweeps and initiating court action. The attendance of looked after children is satisfactory.

Rates of exclusion compare well to statistical neighbours. Although the re-integration of permanently excluded pupils is average for statistical neighbours, there remain only 61.3% receiving 20 hours or less of full-time education. While this is an improvement, too many children and young people do not receive their entitlement of 25 hours. There have been significant improvements in the tracking of pupils out of school. Although there remain 83 children receiving no educational provision, this has fallen from the 140 at the start of this academic year. There are innovative strategies in place to provide for this hard to reach group, including a virtual learning programme.

The rate of improvement in all key indicators shows positive and improving outcomes for children and young people. The good strategies for further developments are embedded in a cohort educational department plan which reflects diverse multi-agency partnerships. There is strong educational leadership to carry the vision and plans forward.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good. The rate of youth crime shows significant reductions in key areas, for example, a 25% reduction in burglary, 33% in robbery and 10% fall in vehicle crime. The rates of re-offending fell from 61.5% to 54%. These figures, together with the improvements in young offenders' take up of education, show significant progress. These improvements are not reflected in the experience of looked after children where there have been increases in the number of final warnings and convictions albeit relating to a small cohort of young people.

The council have taken very seriously the participation of children and young people in decision-making at a range of levels. The CYPSP ensures a multi-agency approach and uses skills from many partners experienced in involving and listening to children and young people. A thorough and innovative programme of events and consultations in 2004 provided feedback to the council to influence Blackpool's Children and Young People plan. A model to ensure the contributions of children and young people affect strategic planning is securely in place. Representation from all children and young people, across all groups is prioritised and the process of involvement begins in the early years.

The authority has signed up to the Hear By Rights Standards which provides the framework to involve children and young people in individual services. There are excellent examples of their contribution, such as young people being involved on behalf of the PCT in researching a preferred location for a sexual health service. Young people were surveyed about the quality of youth service buildings; as a result this has become a priority for the authority. However, there has been limited involvement by young people in evaluating the quality of the overall provision made by the youth service.

The process for enabling children and young people to contribute to decisions about their personal life are good. Representation by pupils with SEN and those looked after at their statutory reviews is positively encouraged and their views taken seriously.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good within the context of Blackpool's economic situation and there are very good systems in place to monitor the impact of future planned investments. Given the high levels of economic deprivation across many areas of Blackpool, together with high unemployment rates, the authority has targeted this area

for high priority investment. The Blackpool Masterplan for the economic regeneration of Blackpool is central to enabling all children and young people to benefit; it provides an excellent model.

The 14 to 19 strategy and the extended federation of schools and colleges is focused on increasing participation and access to education and training, raising attainment and providing support and guidance to young people. Through partnerships with the Lancashire Learning and Skills Council and Connexions, progression mentors target young people at risk of not making a positive transition from school to college or work-based learning. The Aim Higher Strand of Excellence in Cities has enabled more young people to interact with students and professionals and see the benefits of higher education.

Young teenage parents are positively encouraged to stay in education. This is a good example where targeted support is improving outcomes for this vulnerable group. As a result of these and other initiatives, there has been a year-on-year increase in numbers of 16 year olds moving into further education – though the figures are still lower than regional and national averages. The reduction by 39% of young people not in education or training is a significant achievement. The positive trend of 16 to 18 year olds accessing education, training or employment compares well with Lancashire as a whole. There have been significant improvements in the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training and this has shifted performance from 'satisfactory' to 'very good'.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of looked after children’s health care • promotion of the healthy school’s initiative. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of children and young people’s mental health • reduction in the incidence of teenage pregnancy • reduction in the levels of substance misuse.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvements in child protection work. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further reductions in timescales for initial and core assessments • improve stability of long-term placements • reduction in high cost out of borough placements.

<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early years provision and outcomes • attainment at Key Stage 2 • good multi-agency partnerships • good tracking systems • strong educational leadership and educational development plan. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4 • attainment of transient pupils and of girls • educational entitlement for permanently excluded pupils.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategic planning for work with young offenders • reduction in youth crime • consultation with children and young people at a variety of levels. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p>
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackpool’s Masterplan – targeted at all vulnerable groups • increase in 16 year olds entering further education • increase of care leavers in education, employment and training • positive trend in access to education, training and employment. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p>

Service management

The local authority demonstrates a good corporate understanding about the measures needed to counteract high levels of economic deprivation and transience of children and families. Clear and challenging targets have been set within the strategic planning process which are connected well and stem from Blackpool’s Masterplan.

The CYPSP provides a good forum for sharing priorities, the needs and ambitions for the authority. There is good collaboration with services, partner agencies and Blackpool’s schools and colleges.

Priorities for improvement have been based on a high level of analysis and consultation. The joint self-assessment demonstrates the authority’s capacity to be evaluative and prioritise further development accurately.

A change management programme drives the integrated service delivery plans and, within a short period of time, significant improvement on actions for targeted groups has been achieved, albeit from a low baseline. Resources to frontline services are prioritised with sound systems for best value reviews. The recognition that improved outcomes for children and young people are part of an overall re-generation agenda

reflects a good level of collaboration and shows a good capacity for continued improvement.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy lifestyles are promoted for children and young people:

- action taken and impact on high teenage pregnancies and high level of substance and alcohol abuse in 10 to 14 year olds.

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

- the CAMHS service.

Staying safe

Children and young people are provided with a safe environment:

- children's services, particularly at the front line.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- actual attendance rates.

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

- educational provision for permanently excluded pupils.

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: Blackpool Borough 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.	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