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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Mr Crompton

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 28 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

Health outcomes for children and young people are improving. Achievements include 98% of schools participating in the National Healthy School Standard, very good compliance with requirements for health checks for looked after children, a reduction in numbers of teenage conceptions and earlier access to and intervention to child and adolescent mental health services for children and young people in need.

Joint working between the Council and health partners is well established. Joint strategies have been developed, based upon a multi-agency needs analysis, and have been informed by views of children and young people. Proposals for the Children's Trust include plans for a joint commissioning framework to develop a comprehensive range of preventative services that is accessible to all vulnerable children and responsive to the health needs of children with disabilities and those from black and ethnic minorities.

Child and adolescent mental health services, designed to support looked after children and their carers and children in need of protection, are well established. The service is beginning to work with vulnerable children through locating child and adolescent

workers in multi-agency teams and delivering training to a range of professionals. The Solihull Approach, for supporting parents, is an example of good practice.

There is a high level of compliance with statutory requirements for the health care of looked after children. Multi-agency support is provided to children and their carers and is contributing to stability of placements.

Schools, including special schools, are promoting healthy lifestyles for children at primary and secondary levels. Provision of sport facilities is at least satisfactory for all schools. Good support is provided to pupils to promote their mental, physical and sexual health. Schools receive support from the Education Healthcare Partnership and an advisory teacher to prevent drug related behaviour and exclusions. However, schools would welcome further support in addressing this issue. A clear focus on healthy eating has resulted in reductions in the amount of pre-formed processed food that is provided to pupils at lunch times.

Staying safe

The Council gives high priority to safeguarding children and to ensuring that looked after children live in safe and secure environments. A high level of compliance with statutory and procedural guidance supports good outcomes for children in need of protection and good quality of assessments and protection plans.

Good outcomes for looked after children include improved stability in long-term placements and an increase in numbers of children adopted during the year. High levels of compliance with planning and review requirements for looked after children and care leavers support these improvements. Action has been taken to improve compliance with requirements relating to recruitment of foster carers and adopters.

A review of threshold criteria, improved information on access to services and new arrangements for delivery of assessment, including social workers based in extended schools, have resulted in higher numbers of children in need receiving services. However, time scales for initial assessments of need remain too long.

Joint working is well established through the Area Child Protection Committee and plans for development of a Safeguarding Board are at an advanced stage. Designated teachers in schools are well trained in child protection procedures and a good level of support is provided to schools and pupils regarding matters of health and safety and in particular to ensure pupils are safe from bullying and discrimination. Examples of innovative practice include a peer-led anti-bullying scheme in some primary schools.

Numbers of children looked after have continued to increase at a higher rate than the Council's comparator groups. This is mainly due to high numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who need to be accommodated. The pressure on placements is resulting in significant numbers placed in external placements. A multi-faceted

strategy includes recruitment of foster carers, participation in regional commissioning and negotiations with Home Office, is in place but the Council is yet to provide the range of placements it requires to meet the diverse needs of its looked after children and young people.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good. The overall quality of early years education is good, particularly in nursery provision where children are given very good support in developing skills and knowledge in line with the early learning goals. Inspections of childcare have identified a number of aspects relating to the quality of teaching that require improvement.

Standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 are above the national average and that of statistical neighbours. Pupil's performance at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national average but in line with that of statistical neighbours. Results at GCSE have been consistently above the national average for the past five years with regard to the percentage of pupils attaining 5 or more passes at grades A*- C. However, this is not reflected in the percentage of pupils achieving one or more GCSE at grades A*- G, which has been consistently above the national average for the last five years, but has dropped in relation to statistical neighbours in the last two years. The education service is aware of the need to raise performance and is addressing under-achievement especially in schools in the north of the borough. Progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is below average and is satisfactory between the other Key Stages. The local authority recognises the need to raise the performance of pupils from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, and is in the process of developing a mechanism to monitor and evaluate pupil progress.

There has been deterioration since 2003 in respect of the number of looked after children missing twenty-five days or more education. This represents a small number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who have to undergo age-verification processes. The authority has identified the deterioration in the number of looked after children who have achieved at least one GCSE A-G as an issue and is targeting resources accordingly.

The Council is committed to providing an 'inclusive' education for all children. Over half of children identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) are placed in mainstream schools. These schools work closely with special schools to ensure that children can access an appropriate curriculum. At present mechanisms to measure the progress made by children with SEN in mainstream schools are under developed. There is also some innovative practice in the form of a Pupil Referral Unit with outreach to support an inclusive approach together with good levels of compliance with requirements for education plans and leisure activities for looked after children.

Attendance levels are very good compared to the national average. The authority has made very good progress in reducing the number of surplus places in both its primary and secondary schools.

The quality of support for schools placed in formal categories of concern by Ofsted is good. The rate at which a school is removed from a particular category is better than the national average. There is one school with serious weaknesses, but there are no schools requiring special measures. Considerable effort and resources are being used to target the attainment gap between schools in the north and south of the borough. However, there remains a commitment to support every school. Support is tailored to individual schools needs as well as authority wide issues. The authority challenges its schools well and sets appropriate targets for improvement.

Making a positive contribution

The commitment of the Council to listening to the voice of children and young people is evidenced through a wide range of mechanisms and processes that are integrated with service planning and decision making processes. Positive outcomes are demonstrated by the example of Teenager to Work Programme that has led to increased learning and employment opportunities for care leavers and benefits to children in the community in managing discrimination.

Strategies are in place across education and social care services to support involvement of children and young people in design and planning of new and existing services. Learning Support Mentors are in place in some schools. Innovations include the participation of young people in governance processes at local and national levels.

Performance against targets for reducing offending behaviour is at a low level in relation to targets for reducing recidivism. Arrangements to strengthen the consistency and practice through the Youth Offending Team are yet to impact on this area. A very low level of convictions and final warnings for looked after children is due to poor data. This is a priority for improvement.

A comprehensive approach has been designed across all children's services to manage transitions. This builds on effective transition arrangements for young people leaving care and is yet to be implemented for all children in need.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good overall. The average point's score of students entered for GCE/VCE A/AS by schools and colleges is better than the national average.

The quality of education provided for 1419 year-olds is good. The 'Aim Higher' initiative has raised aspirations of Year 9-11 pupils; this year has seen the number of pupils accepted into colleges double from the previous year. The majority of young people move on to higher education. There is good support for young people through the Youth Service/Connexions partnership, to engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school. Good work is also being undertaken by both the Solihull 14-19 Collegiates to prepare young people for employment through work experience placements and Key Stage 4 apprenticeships.

The support provided to care leavers is good. The percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training at the age of 19 is better than the national average and statistical neighbours. Inspections found that young people were being prepared and supported well for independent living.

A multi-agency strategy for children with disabilities is at an advanced stage and should lead to further developments in provision of services to promote choice and independence for children and young people with disabilities and their families.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good performance on health assessments of looked after children • reduction in number of teenage conceptions • placement stability supported by targeted child and adolescent mental health services • early referral to acute and non-acute services for young people who offend • promotion of healthy lifestyles in schools • participation of children and young people in planning and design of services • joint working across agencies. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive range of preventative services is yet to be delivered • participation of school aged pupils in sporting activities • more support to schools to prevent exclusions due to drug-related behaviours.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compliance with child protection procedures across all services • security and stability in placements for looked after children • quality of planning and support for young people leaving care; • progress on development of Safeguarding Board. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timescales for completion of initial assessments are too long • provision of a wider range of placements to meet the diverse needs of looked after children.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attainment levels in the foundation stage • attainment levels at Key stages 1, 2 and 3 • challenge and support provided by School Improvement team in order to raise attainment in all schools • sixth form provision • reduction of surplus places. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • added value between phases • the quality of teaching in settings inspected under the Children Act • achievement gap between schools inside and outside the Excellence Cluster • development of mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and improve performance of pupils from black and ethnic minorities • attainment and school attendance of looked after children.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • range of processes for children and young people to participate in decision making processes • quality of work with young people excluded from schools • teenager-to-work programme • learning support mentors in some schools • participation of young people in community and governance activities. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction in recidivism • management information relating to final warnings and convictions of looked after children • implementation of strategy for managing transitions.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectiveness of secondary and specialist schools • preparation and support to young people leaving care • aim Higher initiative is raising aspirations of years 9 -11 • numbers of pupils accepted into colleges has doubled over a two year period • support to young people through partnerships with Youth Service and Connexions. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further development of multi-agency provision for young people with disabilities to support choice and independent living.

Service management

The capacity to improve is good. Performance against national and local objectives and targets is improving and the rate of progress is good in most areas. There is evidence that services provided by education and social care are contributing to improving outcomes for most children. For children in need, although the development of preventative services is improving, more evidence is needed of impact on outcomes for children with disabilities and for children from black and ethnic minorities.

The Council has fully integrated education and children’s services and plans for development of a Children’s Trust and a Safeguarding Board are at an advanced stage. The Council is well placed to make further improvement as it has ambitious and clear priorities that are underpinned by comprehensive and well thought-out strategies and implementation plans. Effective partnerships across public and voluntary sectors support service delivery. The Council’s proposal for development of a Children’s Trust includes plans to develop further a multi-agency needs analysis and a comprehensive joint commissioning framework.

Processes for performance and risk management across education and social care are well established. However, capacity is variable across social care and education services. In social care, recruitment and retention pressures, together with the impact of costs of external placements on the rate of development of preventative services, are substantial and are acknowledged by the Council. In education, there is more capacity as recruitment and retention of staff and management of school resources is not inhibiting progress.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

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

- progress on development of preventative CAMHS services.

Enjoying and achieving

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

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

- quality of provision for children with SEN in mainstream schools.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, are supported in managing changes and responding to challenges in their lives:

- transition arrangements for children and young people.

Achieving economic well-being

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to achieve economic well-being:

- provision of services for children and their families to support choice and independence.

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: Solihull Metropolitan 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	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

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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