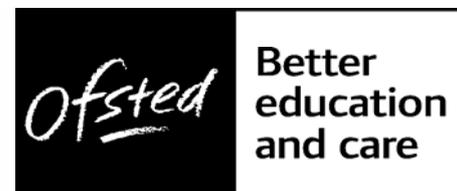


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
Email edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Mrs Norma Cadwallader
Interim Strategic Director for Children's Services
Education Department
Warrington Borough Council
Newtown House
Buttermarket Street
Warrington WA1 2NJ

1 December 2005

Dear Mrs Cadwallader

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 20 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. The incidence of teenage pregnancy overall has declined considerably on the 1998 baseline and is now below the national trend. The healthy schools team is a jointly funded health and education initiative. Some 35 out of the 89 schools in the borough are accredited within the scheme and work is underway in a further 20. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively with performance during 2004/05 improved on the previous year. The council works in a collaborative way with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and other health partners to promote the mental health needs of children and young people. A wide range of approaches is being adopted with a concentrated effort to target preventative measures. The Primary Care Trust acknowledges the health under-funding into this service and because of current resource levels has not yet formulated any action. School inspection evidence during 2003/04 (based on 17 school inspections) showed all schools meeting statutory requirements in respect of sex and relationships education.

Participation in sport is judged as good or very good in 8 out of the 17 school inspections during 2004. The performance of the pupil referral unit is poor with regard to this outcome. Potentially good initiatives are identified in the council's self-assessment but the document is weak on providing evidence on the impact of initiatives in terms of improving outcomes.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) of Children's Social Care Services in August 2004 identified that children and young people are provided with the safe environment to which they are entitled. It established that there is effective joint working across the service and reported that the council continues to explore the best option for children and young people.

Evidence supports continuing good performance on referrals, assessments and child protection. Referrals have increased by 12% during 2004/05 and further provision has been allowed for 2005/06. A town centre base has been developed with partner agencies. These revised access arrangements and published referral routes have increased the number of referrals into the service. Only 3 out of 10 referrals lead to an assessment and the rate is low relative to statistical neighbours. Further action is needed to secure robust contractual arrangements with agencies that undertake work on behalf of the council to ensure continuing effective outcomes for those children in need who do not enter the social care system.

The council remains compliant on timescales for assessment despite a period of acute difficulty regarding the recruitment and retention of social workers. Two children on the child protection register were not assigned a social worker. There has also been a fall in the percentage of looked after children who received social work support during 2004/05 to 92.8% from previously very good performance of 100% (although none were without a social worker for longer than six weeks). There is robust tracking of unallocated cases. The number of children on the child protection register has increased by 19% over the last two years and the reported out-turn on the percentage of child protection reviews to timescale during 2004/05 is 83%. The council's failure to meet this key threshold target is a matter of concern.

There is an increase in the number of looked after children during 2003/04. The number of children placed in residential care remains low relative to similar councils and the use of formal kinship care is effective but is resulting in higher unit costs. The CSCI undertook a fostering inspection during 2004/05 and the outcome was positive.

The number of children placed out-of-borough has increased but the council is sustaining the majority of vulnerable children and young people who have complex and challenging needs within the borough and performance remains very good. There is an identified rising trend in the number of children with three or more placements although performance remains comparable with the national average. This is coupled with a fall in the performance on the percentage of children who have been in the care system for both 2.5 years and 4 years, respectively, and who have remained in the same foster placement for two years. The council does need to ensure that the needs of children and young people who remain in the social care system for a long time are not neglected because current performance is poor.

Services for children with disabilities continue to operate from a low baseline and are a priority for development for the council and its partners during 2005/06 as is the need to strategically determine the role of the special schools.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are very good. The overall quality of day care and early years provision is very good and enables children to make a good start to their education. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are well above both national averages and results from statistical neighbours. This is the case for reading, writing and mathematics. Through the use of independent evaluations, the authority monitors the sufficiency of its provision in this area well.

Standards at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 are also well above both national averages and statistical neighbours in English, mathematics and science and are rising. The performance in science in 2004 at Key Stage 2, whilst above 2003 and thus against the national downward trend, was slightly below that of 2001 and 2002. At Key Stage 3 standards are showing a sharply rising trend in all three subjects. General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results are also very good. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades was 59% in 2004, a figure that is well above the national average as well as that for similar authorities. This figure has been rising rapidly for several years and is 8.5% above the figure for 2000. The percentage of pupils achieving one or more A* to G grade was 97.3% in 2004, in line with national averages.

The progress children make from their very good start, as reflected in value added indicators, is at least satisfactory. Some of the indicators show better than average progress. There is an upward trend in the attainment levels, which in many cases is better than the national improvement trend. Resources have been effectively targeted at specific areas of concern, and have focused on the more disadvantaged wards in the borough. These have brought about improvement: writing standards in primary schools was one such target, and Key Stage 2 English results in 2004 were significantly up on 2003. The GCSE results in relatively low performing schools were another such target and effectively targeted resources have led to improved levels of performance. Children who are looked after by the authority both attend school well and achieve very well in comparison with similar areas and national averages.

Attendance at school is very good when compared to national and similar authorities. However, the gap between the authority and its statistical neighbours is narrowing. At both primary and secondary levels, it is the rate of unauthorised absence that shows a recent increase, something which the authority ascribes to a tighter approach adopted by schools to holidays being taken during school term time. The rate of exclusions has been rising recently although it remains in line with or better than national comparisons.

The school improvement service effectively identifies schools that are a potential cause for concern. Support for such schools and those that do enter a formal category is good. Currently, there are 5 of the authority's 87 schools in a category of some description. The one pupil referral unit is in special measures and is not making sufficient progress. The authority is currently considering a range of options for this unit. There are also concerns regarding residential provision for pupils with special educational needs. This is due to be reviewed during 2005/06 as part of a review of all special educational provision. (There was limited evidence available as part of this process regarding this particular outcome with respect to children with disabilities.)

Evidence on recreational activities and voluntary learning is limited but indicates that provision is good (from 2004 inspection data based on 17 school inspections). The authority's self-assessment acknowledges that the borough's youth service is not meeting targets for the numbers of young people that participate in its work or who achieve accredited outcomes from it.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. Inspection evidence from the initial registrations and inspections of nursery education indicates very good provision. Findings from school inspections regarding social, moral, spiritual and cultural education are satisfactory, as are the findings regarding freedom from racism, bullying and other forms of discrimination. The national target to reduce recidivism by 5% has been met and the proportion engaged in education, employment or training was above overall national rate for the first quarter of 2005. There has been a significant improvement in the final warnings and convictions data for looked after children from 2003/04 to 2004/05. Good links exist between the local YOT and secondary headteachers, with an agreement in place for the reintroduction of young offenders into mainstream provision.

Although a participation worker is in place to help children that are looked after to manage changes in their lives, the percentage who contributed their opinion at their statutory reviews has fallen to 64%, a proportion identified by the authority as poor. A range of mechanisms exist across the authority's services, and within partner agencies such as the Connexions partnership and the voluntary sector, to enable children and young people to contribute their views. These are particularly good regarding mechanisms for those with special educational needs. However, the authority acknowledges that there is no coherent approach to the participation and involvement of young people. A youth sector forum has recently been established to consider a strategic approach to this work, and to help construct the council's response to the recent Green paper on youth issues. This is to include the formulation of a strategic role for the youth service.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are very good. The 14 to 19 area inspection of Warrington and the Ellesmere Port and Neston, Vale Royal and Macclesfield districts of Cheshire carried out in June 2004 confirmed that the overall quality of provision for education and training was good. The achievements of learners were confirmed as good. GCSE outcomes are above national averages and levels for similar authorities. Pass rates in the two sixth form colleges in the area, (one of which is in Warrington itself) are high. The average point scores in schools with sixth forms are above average, although the progress of post-16 students in one school with a small sixth form in Warrington itself is unsatisfactory.

The levels of participation in post-16 education and training are very high. In 2003, the level of participation in education post-16 was 86%. Destination data for the Year 11 leavers in 2004 is excellent, with 91% entering education, employment or training. The percentage of Year 11 leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) was only 4.9%, a reduction of 2.5% on the previous year and one of the lowest figures in the country. Schools across the area make good use of a range of Connexions-run projects for pupils at risk.

Provision for vulnerable pupils is good overall. Some 89% of children looked after by the authority and care leavers proceeded to employment or training last year. The progression of pupils from special schools or units is also good: 67% entered full-time education with 6.5% entering employment. Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good in most colleges. However, there are some areas of weakness: for two of the more vulnerable groups of young people, the numbers moving into education, employment or training is below target. These are the 13 to 18 year olds supervised by the YOT team, and the 16 to 19 year olds with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

There is a shared commitment towards 14 to 19 education between key local partners. The local Learning and Skills Council, the two LEAs in the area and the connexions partnership have established good working relations at both the strategic and operational levels. They have provided strong leadership in developing a 14 to 19 strategy for the area. At the time of the area inspection there was insufficient collaboration with work-based learning providers and some schools were not responding to the need for collaborative working.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performance on teenage pregnancy • effective outcomes for looked after children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of health data to identify the health issues of all children and young people in the borough.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • kinship care • good performance on re-referrals • positive fostering inspection • positive CSCI Children’s inspection. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviews of children on the child protection register • performance on long-term stability • design and delivery of services to children with disabilities • strategic intentions for special schools.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early years provision • overall progress through schooling • standards achieved at all key stages in national tests • GCSE results • attendance at school • school outcomes for looked after children • the school improvement service. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pupil referral unit • youth service participation.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early years inspections • collaboration between YOT and children’s services • mechanisms for children with special educational needs to contribute their views. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategy for the youth service • percentage of looked after children contributing to reviews • overall strategy for the participation of children and young people.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good collaboration between the LEAs and the LLSC and Connexions partnership • achievements of 14 to 19 year olds • outcomes for care leavers • participation figures in post-16 full time education • NEET figures amongst the lowest nationally. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outcomes for 13 to 18 year olds supervised by YOT • learning difficulties and/or disabilities for 16 to 19 year olds into education, employment or training.

Service management

The council has set itself ambitious and challenging targets. One of the six strategic objectives for 2005/06 relates directly to children and young people. The council's self-assessment refers to the positive engagement with children, young people and their families, but there is no clear evidence as yet as to how the views of these groups are directly influencing the direction and actions of the council. Warrington's Change Action Plan recognises the need for cohesive participation together with an involvement strategy for children and young people across the borough that also engages with all partners. The council recognises that it is important for all children in the borough to have a sustained voice if outcomes are to be effective and meet locally identified needs.

The district audit letter 2004 acknowledges the significant change in terms of leadership, both at member and chief executive level. A lead member has now been appointed to take forward the children's agenda alongside a revised structure, new management arrangements together with the workforce development that should provide the opportunity to increase the council's capacity to deliver.

Warrington overall is a low spending very efficient council. The audit letter also confirms the council's financial arrangements are sound. However, it reports that the council faces significant financial pressures and it is important that it remains committed to maintaining a sustainable financial strategy. It is reported that there has been significant investment into the children's agenda to support progress.

The council has very low vacancy rates at only a fifth of the level of statistical neighbours and staff turnover within the council is average. There are no unfilled full-time teaching posts in education, but the council is experiencing problems in the recruitment of social workers. Sickness absence levels are very high with one day in nine lost to sickness. Training indicators are all modest.

Performance management within the council has continued to be identified as a strength and is acknowledged in external inspection reports for both social care and education. The annual work programme for Scrutiny and Overview Committee is being developed. This should provide the council with a robust monitoring and auditing process. Corporate leaders and members need to be able to demonstrate that they are listening to children and young people and that proposed changes are making a positive impact.

The education and social care departments know themselves well and historically have delivered good outcomes for children and young people. This provides a good baseline from which to develop strategic and operational integration. There is a wealth of effective and strong partnership working and the change plan acknowledges the need for a comprehensive approach to the planning and commissioning of services.

Historically, however, there is no evidence to demonstrate a sustained joint commitment and agreement with health colleagues to resource an approach that will address local needs in a consistent way. The council recognises this as a priority for change.

The council is judged to have adequate capacity to improve further.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

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

- CAMHS health funding.

Staying safe

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

- children with disabilities.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- the review of special education provision.

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

- progress of the pupil referral unit.

Making a positive contribution

Action is taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending by children and young people:

- Youth Offending Team.

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

- the strategy for the Youth Service.

Achieving economic well-being

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

- destination outcomes for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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: Warrington 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.	4
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	2

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