

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)



*Cllr Bill Hyde
Chair of Scrutiny Board
(Children's Services)*

Membership of the Board:

Councillor Bill Hyde (Chair)	Mr Tony Britten
Councillor Colin Campbell	Mr Ian Falkingham
Councillor Judith Chapman (part)	Ms Celia Foote
Councillor Judith Elliott	Prof Peter Gosden
Councillor Ronald Feldman	Mr Robert Greaves
Councillor Sharon Hamilton	Mr Tim Hales
Councillor Roger Harington	Mrs Sandra Hutchinson
Councillor Alan Lamb	Ms Taira Kayani
Councillor Brenda Lancaster	Mrs Sue Knights
Councillor Jacqueline Langdale	Ms Jeannette Morris-Boam
Councillor David Morton (part)	
Councillor Tom Murray	
Councillor Karen Renshaw	

The Chair's Summary

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to return to chairing the Scrutiny Board this year. As always, the members of the Board have been tireless in their commitment to scrutiny, and I must particularly pay tribute to those who willingly volunteer for working groups, visits and other activities over and above the monthly Board meetings. Without this additional work, there is no doubt that we would not be nearly as effective, given the breadth of our remit.

This year the council has been subject to both a Corporate Assessment and Joint Area Review inspection, and inspectors from both teams interviewed Board members as part of the assessment process. Whilst we still await the outcome of the inspection report, I would like to thank those officers who continued to support our inquiries conscientiously at the same time as they were busy meeting the demands of the inspection process.

As always, our work programme has been a delicate balancing act. We need to ensure that we maintain an overview and focus on performance, holding people to account for delivering the Every Child Matters outcomes, whilst also identifying some more in-depth pieces of work where we can add value to the development of policy and service delivery. Our inquiry on services for 8-13 year olds is a good example of this. We have also responded to external requests for our input, as in our inquiry on Fountain Primary School.

This year has been the first year of a new, more rigorous recommendation tracking system for scrutiny, which has helped us to keep a closer eye on the impact of our recommendations. I look forward to seeing this become embedded over the next year, enabling us to be robust in challenging any areas where progress is not happening.

I am especially pleased that we have continued to support the Young People's Scrutiny Forum this year, and am proud that their work was chosen as a case study of good practice by the IDeA for their children's services scrutiny toolkit. Following the publication of the 'Catching the Bus' report last year, Forum members have worked jointly with Scrutiny Board members and officers to monitor their recommendations and also to progress some of them. I wish the Forum well with their new inquiry, on the environment.

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Services for 8-13 year olds

The Leeds Children and Young People's Plan sets out local priorities and actions to deliver universal and targeted services to all children and young people aged 0-19, and older for those with special needs.

Within this framework, the Scrutiny Board identified the 8-13 age group as a key target group. Early years and youth services are well established services with recognised target age ranges at either end of the 0-19 age spectrum. Members felt there was now a need to extend this approach to join up in the middle in a more formalised manner. This complemented the strong conclusion of the Board's inquiry on youth services, carried out last year, which was that there needed to be more investment in universal and targeted services for the 8-13 age group, and that seeking to re-engage young people and their families in structured provision and support at 13-plus was often very difficult.

The Board identified a number of aspects of the 'infrastructure' necessary to successful delivery of universal and targeted services for 8-13 year olds as the focus for the inquiry:

- Meeting the requirement to provide information for children, young people and families
- The use of assets, particularly schools but also other buildings, to deliver services
- Governance models in relation to extended schools
- The role of councillors in supporting and promoting local delivery of services for 8-13 year olds
- The opportunities that are available for young people aged 8-13 to participate in decision-making and influence issues that affect them
- The infrastructure required to deliver the play strategy

The Board heard from a wide range of witnesses involved in the delivery of services to this age group, and also carried out visits to various providers as part of the inquiry.

Some of our main recommendations were:

To be completed following publication of the report

Education Standards

At its first meeting of the year, the Scrutiny Board identified education standards as a topic for one of its major inquiries for the year. The choice of this topic accorded with priorities in the Vision for Leeds and the Children and Young People's Plan, as well as reflecting a recurrent theme identified from the Board's regular consideration of performance management information.

Members initially identified two potential areas of focus for the inquiry: the 14-19 age group, and early years and primary transition. Having considered the two areas, the Board decided to focus this year's inquiry on trying to help break the cycle of underachievement at the 14-19 stage of the education system and to reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET).

However this was accompanied by a strong recommendation that an inquiry is prioritised in 2008/09 on those entering the education system.

The Board's inquiry looked at the following areas:

- How pupils are identified as at risk of becoming NEET
- The support provided to pupils in schools to support their attainment and to prepare them for adult life
- The role of school improvement services and curriculum development in supporting the achievement of this group of pupils
- Attendance, behaviour and exclusion strategies to encourage pupils to engage in their education
- The role of other services such as extended services and study support, and family support services
- Tracking of pupil destinations and achievement post-16

The inquiry combined the presentation of written evidence to formal Board meetings, with a number of visits to schools, colleges and training providers. Members were able to discuss the issues with a range of young people as well as with professionals.

Some of our main recommendations were:

To be completed following publication of the report

Young People's Scrutiny Forum

Following the very successful 'Catching the Bus' report produced by the Young People's Scrutiny Forum last year, young people have chosen 'Protecting our Environment' as their next theme.

Their inquiry, which spans this year and next year, will focus on three themes: waste management, education and sustainable buildings. The inquiry aims to:

- Establish ways in which schools and other Leeds City Council services can reduce their impact upon the environment, and encourage them to implement these changes.
- Encourage Leeds City Council and Education Leeds to play a part in raising awareness of environmental issues among the people of Leeds.
- Ensure the opinions of young people in Leeds, with regard to environmental issues, are heard and acted upon by decision makers.

The Forum hopes to make a short film to accompany their inquiry.

In the meantime, a joint group of young people, Scrutiny Board members and officers from the council and Metro, have worked together to monitor progress with the recommendations of the 'Catching the Bus' report. This has been an important development in ensuring that the young people are able to see the results of their work translated into action.



Members of the Young People's Scrutiny Forum during scoping of the environment inquiry



Inclusion

A scrutiny working group looked in detail at two of the key objectives of the revised Leeds Inclusive Learning Strategy:

- The further development of specialist provision, including the role of the Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres (SILCs);
- The further development of the behaviour continuum and provision, including the role of the pupil referral units.

The working group also assessed progress with the recommendations of the Scrutiny Board's 2006 report on the SILCs.

We intend to continue to monitor progress in this area next year, as the Inclusive Learning Strategy develops further. In particular we have made some recommendations regarding the effectiveness of behaviour interventions and the use of inclusion finances by schools.

Fountain Primary School

Early in the year the Board was asked to undertake an independent inquiry into the way Fountain Primary School had been established by Education Leeds. The focus of the inquiry was to explore the circumstances surrounding this particular primary school reorganisation scheme, that consequently led to the need for staffing reductions after only two years of the new school being in operation. As a result of the Scrutiny Board agreeing to do this work, staff called off planned strike action.

Our main recommendations included:

- That priority be given to funding the project to bring the school together on one site. (This project has recently been agreed.)
- Improved and more transparent projections of pupil numbers to inform future decisions about the need for school places;
- Improved communication with parents when new schools are established;
- Proposals for closer working between schools, governing bodies and Education Leeds through all stages of school reorganisation and the period immediately following.

The Board's full work programme 2007/08

Review of existing policy

Education Standards Inquiry
Fountain Primary School Inquiry
Inclusion
Parenting Support

Development of new policy

Inquiry into services for 8-13 year olds
Inclusion Strategy
Review of 14-19 education and training provision in Leeds

Performance Management and Monitoring

Overview of Children's Services and Children and Young People's Plan priorities
Performance Management information
Standards in Leeds schools and Ofsted inspections
Monitoring of recommendations from previous inquiries including:

- Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres (SILCs)
- Adoption in Leeds
- Catching the Bus
- Implications of Trust Schools for the Local Authority
- Youth Services
- Review of 14-19 education and training provision in Leeds
- Departmental Communications

Budget and Policy Framework

Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-2011
Children and Young People's Plan

Briefings

David Young Community Academy

Young People's Scrutiny Forum

Monitoring of recommendations from Catching the Bus inquiry
Protecting the Environment Inquiry