

Joint Area Review

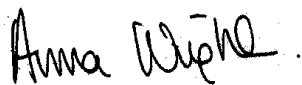
of services for Children and Young People in Reading

January 2009

Every four years, an organisation called the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) comes to Reading to look in detail at our services for children and young people. It looks closely at whether services for those children and young people who most need help are working well or not. In September 2008, Ofsted sent a team of inspectors to look at our services. They talked to children and young people and their families and also talked to our staff. This report tells you what Ofsted found out about our services. They found some things that were working well, but they also found some services that need to be made better, so that they can give more help to children and young people.

As the Councillor and Director responsible for Children's Services, we are committed to making the improvements that Ofsted has asked us to make on behalf of children and young people in Reading. Since September, we have made a lot of progress in improving services, but there is still more that we can do. In particular, we need to do more to make sure that children and young people are safe from harm and neglect and that fewer young people become parents before they are 18. We are being helped to do this by top management in the Council and the health service.

We are very grateful to our Youth Cabinet for helping us to write this report. We always take the views of children and young people very seriously, and we really value ideas for improving the services we provide.



Anna Wright
Director of Education and Children's Services



John Ennis
Lead Councillor for Children's Services



"The youth service is now having a greater impact and has achieved good levels of participation"

"The local authority assessment team and the parent partnership service provide outstanding support"

What is JAR? Why bother with it?

Joint Area Reviews (JAR) assess how well services within an area work to improve the services, organisations and care of children and young people.

Over two weeks in September 2008, the JAR inspectors came and looked at a wide variety of services in Reading that are around to provide support, help and advice for young people.

They looked at services run by the council and other organisations; as well as talking to staff and parents and, of course, children and young people. This newsletter will summarise and outline what was said in the report, published by Ofsted.

The Grades...

Area	Meaning	Score
Safeguarding	How safe are all children and young people?	Poor
Looked-after Children	How well looked after are Children In Care?	OK
Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities	Are young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities given all the support they need?	OK
Service Management	How well are services organised and maintained? Are the bosses doing their job?	OK
Capacity to Improve	Can we get better? How well is it going?	OK
14-19 Education	How good is the provision for 14-19 education and training? How are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) young people coping?	OK
Teenage Conceptions	How well is SRE (Sex and Relationship Education) delivered? How well is the provision to reduce teenage pregnancies organised?	Poor

Negative Points



The well being of a small number of looked after children is negatively affected by frequent changes in social worker.

Parents and carers of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have to work hard to secure the help they need.

Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is not helped by the lack of school nurses.

Safety for young people is poor due to a lot of weaknesses in key parts of child protection and social care. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is largely ineffective.

Provision to reduce teenage conceptions is poor. A lack of good information is stopping both planning, and service changes leading to improvement.

SRE is variable and advice on good sexual health is not reaching all young people.

Weak management has resulted in poor replies to serious child protection issues and in reducing teenage pregnancies.

Despite the number of young people that are achieving Level 2 qualifications, the number still remains below the national average.



Positive Points



The problems with safeguarding have been noted and action is being taken. Organisations are working well together to prevent and support some of the broader aspects of Safeguarding.

The council assessment team and the Parent Partnership service provide outstanding support. Service organisation is improving.

Most looked after children and young people benefit from living in good family placements.

Good recent track record of improvements in schools

Numbers of young people that are NEET have fallen over the past three years. The youth service is now having a greater impact and has achieved good levels of participation among young people from vulnerable groups.

Education in secondary schools for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is comparatively good.

Service management and capacity to improve are OK. Good partnership working is taking place.



RECOMMENDATIONS

For immediate action:

- make sure that managers carry out regular reviews of social care files according to an agreed set of rules.
- make sure that all looked after children have a clear plan for their future which is reviewed often.
- make sure that everyone knows who is in charge of funding the provision of specialist equipment for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to use at home and at school.

For the next six months:

- make sure that all foster carers receive an annual review of their performance conducted by an independent chairperson.
- increase the provision of short-break care* and social worker support for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- make sure that lots of information, advice and guidance on post-16 options is accessible by all young people
- make sure there is always good access to high quality SRE, and that information, advice and guidance on good sexual health is available to all young people

For longer term:

- make sure that services aimed at reducing teenage pregnancies are co-ordinated and meet the needs of all young people
- increase the number of school nurses in line with government targets for 2010

*this is time-out for the young person, where they are not being cared for by their carer or families.

**FOR THE FULL LIST OF
RECOMMENDATIONS
SUGGESTED BY THE JAR
AND FOR THE FULL REPORT,
SEE THE JAR WEBPAGES ON
READINGYOUTH.COM**