

Clive House
70 Petty France
Westminster
London
SW1H 9EX

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



7 September 2020

Judith Finlay
Executive Director Children Adults and Public Health
London Borough of Ealing

Louise Hocking
HMI, London

Email: Finlayj@ealing.gov.uk

Dear Judith

Social care annual engagement meeting on 3 September 2020 (via Teams)

Attendees

Judith Finlay, Executive Director Children Adults and Public Health
Carolyn Fair, Director Children and Families
Gary Jones, Assistant Director Children and Families
Charles Barnard, Assistant Director Early Help and SEND
Tamara Quinn, Assistant Director Resources and Planning
Julie Lewis, Director Learning, Standards and School Partnership
Louise Hocking, HMI, Social Care, Ofsted
Carolyn Adcock, Senior HMI, Social Care, Ofsted

The self-assessment plus the current impact of Covid-19 on service delivery

Thank you for your self-assessment, which was clear and well-presented, and provided a good overview of current performance and plans. It was a positive read and provided encouraging evidence of your work and progress. We can see that you have a focus on equality, diversity and issues affected by 'black lives matter', and we will be interested to hear about the impact of this as this unfolds over the next year. It was also positive that the views and feedback from children were reflected in your self-assessment.

You spoke of the considerable work that you have been doing since the inspection and the progress made in relation to performance information and data, describing increased ownership at a senior level, assisted by better data and audit processes.

You described your data as being 100% better than where you were last year and that you are largely confident now, but there are still some glitches in the CIN data.

Other challenges include the timeliness of assessment in some specific teams such as the adolescent team, and the rate of S47 enquiries, issues that you continue to work on. Carolyn Fair noted that the data in the July performance report regarding S47 enquiries is not accurate, and further work is being undertaken to cleanse the data. Carolyn will also look at the figures for children subject to an ICPC in July who had previously been subject to an ICPC in the last 12 months, as the current figures indicate 50%, which seems high.

Team managers receive regular, helpful management reports and you have a weekly managers forum to look at practice and performance issues. Your increased level of scrutiny and oversight means that you are now able to pick up and rectify anomalies more quickly.

Some recent successes include the increased percentage of children placed with your foster carers due to the level of wrap around support available through Brighter Futures, and the new Haydock home offering a respite service for children with disabilities, due to open on 23 September. You also spoke of the longstanding and consistent success of your care leavers in employment, education and training and that you remain one of the top local authorities in the country for the proportion of care leavers at university.

Staff are generally seen as well supported and content, and you provide a monthly forum where any issues can be openly raised with senior managers. The average caseload is now at a manageable level of 16. You currently have an agency staff rate of 24% and this remains a challenge for you, although you have a range of strategies in place to reduce the dependency on agency staff.

Additional capacity is in place, including some permanent senior positions, a new assistant director children and families and a new head of the front door service, as well as some additional temporary frontline social work posts. Overall, you consider that you 'still have a lot to do but a lot of progress has been made'.

The use of flexibilities, as set out in the DfE Coronavirus guidance

You have not needed to use the additional flexibilities but have seen some strengths from a different way of working that you will take forward. You described how online meetings have enabled closer working relationships between schools and social workers and they have also been successful in supporting engagement and attendance with the safeguarding partnership. Online fostering and adoption panels have worked well. Young people have enjoyed using the social media platforms and

responded well to the flexible style of communication. You continued to visit children with immediate concerns or on a child protection plan during the lockdown period and, as of 3 August, you are back to visiting all children directly as a matter of course.

Actions taken in response to the ILACS in November 2019

Thank you for your clear and comprehensive action plan that provided a helpful level of detail. You described the key challenge as being your work with children in need. Your child in need procedure was relaunched in June and visits are now expected to take place every three weeks (currently 70% are in this timescale) having moved from six weeks at the time of the inspection to four weeks in June. The CIN panel is held monthly to support staff and provide additional oversight.

Generally, you described a dynamic line of sight with the increased ownership of work at a senior level supported by improved data and systems to oversee performance and the quality of work. Over 400 pieces of work were scrutinized as part of the weekly audit process, with learning used to develop the management development programme. You have been careful to engage staff and provide positive recognition of strong practice through weekly communication with all staff.

Any broader issues that are affecting the delivery of children's social care services, e.g. schools or early years provision

You explained how early years services had held up well under the recent demands, with all children's centres remaining open during the lockdown period. The change of your health provider approximately eighteen months ago has enabled a good level of integration with children's social care and positive results.

You described how schools in Ealing have continued to function well, with all schools being open at some point over recent months, and 80% open every day. You have seen your strong existing infrastructure serve you well in these challenging times. This has included positive action by schools to share, support and learn from each other and strong engagement from the designated safeguarding leads through the inclusion networks. You spoke of the biggest worry being for children with disabilities and the strain and anxiety experienced by parents during recent months. This has been heightened by the recent tragic death of a child.

You have planned for any potential strain on children returning to school through such actions as providing a dedicated advice line for schools, staffed by a deputy team manager, and you will be reviewing any impact on children electively home educated at the end of September. You have additionally been successful in your

social workers in schools bid, which will see eight high schools receiving dedicated social work support.

Unregulated/unregistered services. Are there any children in care and care leavers in such provision? What are the arrangements in relation to matching with such resources and what steps are undertaken to ensure the safety and quality of placements?

You confirmed that you do not have any children placed in unregistered accommodation. You are aware of the individual circumstances of any children living in unregulated provision (six 16-year-olds and 20 17-year-olds) and you maintain a close oversight on the experiences of these children.

The local authority's current financial and political context

The political context in Ealing remains stable and supportive to the work of children's services. Financially, you described challenging circumstances similar to those in many other local authorities, and you will be looking to draw up a council-wide savings plan going forward.

Safeguarding Partnership arrangements

You spoke of how the safeguarding partnership arrangements have held up well during Covid-19; strong engagement and consistent attendance have been assisted by online working. Work on serious youth violence and rapid reviews, for example, are working well. Multi-agency training is generally positive and has been able to quickly re-establish itself as an online service.

Updates on actions following child safeguarding incident notifications, learning from rapid reviews and/or serious case reviews that are in progress

You spoke of the impact of recent serious incidents, including recent tragic deaths, and the support that has been available to families, schools and social workers. The national panel is aware of the two cases where notification was delayed and they are satisfied with the circumstances that impacted on this.

All care leavers have had their immigration status reviewed where relevant. This follows a case in which two care leavers were at risk of deportation as they had not signed the necessary documentation, despite repeated efforts by the local authority to progress their applications. The two young people now have settled status.

Regional adoption agency arrangements

The West London RAA, hosted by Ealing, has been in place since October 2019 and continues to show a strong performance. This includes 17 new adopters, 17 children placed for adoption and 12 early permanence placements. Support is also available for SGO placements.

After initial scoping, you are in the process of applying for funding for an equivalent regional fostering arrangement with two neighboring authorities (Brent and Hounslow).

Discussion around future visits by Ofsted

Carolyn Adcock spoke of the 'enhanced' focused visits that will commence in local authorities this month. You said that, if possible, you would like time to consolidate the work that you are doing with children in need, so later would be better for you. Carolyn Fair is on leave in October.

Julie asked if schools judged to require improvement would be included in the Ofsted visits in the autumn. Carolyn Adcock has since confirmed with John Kennedy, Acting Regional Director, that not all schools judged as requiring improvement will receive a visit.

The approximate timing of the next social care self-evaluation and annual engagement meeting, and education-focused meeting.

John Kennedy will contact you to suggest an online 'catch up' discussion on education matters this term, rather than the usual scheduled meeting.

You said that either late July or September 2021 would suit you for the next social care annual engagement meeting.

Thank you again for a very constructive meeting.

Yours sincerely

Louise

Louise Hocking
Her Majesty's Inspector

Please note: This letter is not published by Ofsted and the comments made have not been evaluated as part of an inspection.