

Children's Services – Report to Council – November.07.

It is pleasing to report that the last year has been a good one for Children's Services as exemplified by our academic test and exam results. At all the Key Stages we did well and our average point scores were amongst the highest in the country. At Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and at GCSE level, the young people of York scored highly. Our average GCSE scores of 68% A* to Cs were a clear 5% ahead of improvement figures seen nationally and some of our schools were amongst the most improved in the country. Special mention must be made of York High, whose results will not appear in the league tables as they did not officially exist until now, with the former Oaklands school achieving a 9% increase. Other schools in traditionally more disadvantaged communities excelled, with Burnholme Community College, achieving a 15% increase and Canon Lea a 17% improvement. In addition, Burnholme was one of the most improved schools nationally in their Value Added scores; quite an achievement. Our sixth form students also did well, many of them gaining high points scores and thus their first choice of university place.

There is evidence that high quality teaching facilities support that progress made in our schools and there is a clear link with the capital programme. There is currently good progress with the rebuilds at Joseph Rowntree, Manor and York High School and there are many improvements to school buildings elsewhere around the city.

We have had a number of good Ofsted reports recently and now there are seven schools with 'outstanding' Ofsteds – a high proportion of the total number of our schools. At Rufforth, Hemplands, Headlands, Naburn, Archbishop Holgates, Copmanthorpe and St Lawrence's, there has been much rejoicing and a great deal of relief as they had their efforts recognised and acknowledged by Ofsted. As well as those in this list, there are a number of other schools who have been given the category of 'good with outstanding features' – which is a great achievement.

Our secondary schools have been working hard to plan for the introduction of the new applied diplomas. The diploma in Engineering and that in Society, Health and Development will be available from September 2008 with diplomas in Media and ICT available in York from September 2009. "Pre-diploma" courses linked to Creative and Media and Construction will be offered at level 2 in 2008-09. It is hoped that students will be able to have realistic work placements where they can apply what they have learnt in the classroom to a work situation. This will give our young people some of the breadth of curriculum that is needed as we plan for them to stay on in some form of education or training up to 18yrs.

The new York College has opened and provides a spectacular learning environment for young people to access a whole range of courses from a wide variety of A levels to a great number of applied, vocational and skills based courses. We are planning a strategic approach to post 16 provision alongside the college, working to retain good will between all establishments. I am a firm believer that collaboration is better than competition.

Our school governing bodies continue to do sterling work. There are 174 Local Authority governors as well as those from the community, alongside staff and parent governors and they give of their time freely to support our schools. I am very grateful to all of them.

The whole of the Children's Services senior management team is now in place and working well. They are hard at work preparing for the Joint Area Review and the anticipated Annual Performance Assessment scores for this year are expected to help. We are scored in each area of Every Child Matters – Staying Safe, Being Healthy, Enjoying and Achieving, Making a Positive Contribution and Achieving Economic Well-Being as well as our prospects for still further improvement. We are also given an overall rating and we await the announcement of our score with interest.

Underpinning all this and no less important but much less visible – is our provision for children's social care. Both our Fostering Service and the Adoption Service were inspected recently and got good reports. Our thanks are due to all those families who adopt children in the city and to all the many foster parents who look after children and young people on our behalf. In our role as corporate parents, we have a duty to make sure they are cared for and brought up in as happy and healthy a way as possible, and our skilled team of Foster carers from all parts of the city carry out that job on our behalf very well indeed. The Glen – our respite home for children with complex needs – is ranked as excellent and thought of as an exemplar by other authorities.

Our child mortality rates are low and our immunisation levels high. Road accidents involving children are falling and positively better than average national performance.

We have maintained a reduction in those young people who are placed outside the authority and I hope very much we shall be able to sustain this trend. Our thanks are due to all the officers who work so hard on our behalf to make sure that those who have to be looked after by the authority are looked after well.

We can demonstrate success in engaging young people both in education and training – we have low NEET figures (for those Not in Education, Employment or Training) – and our school attendance figures are generally improving. Outside school hours we have more evidence from Schools Out that 53,000 young people engaged with the programmes this summer, up a third on the numbers 3 years ago. There is more accredited work and the range of positive activities that are offered can be seen to impacting on youth crime levels, which are down.

We are a Beacon council for Early Intervention and know the importance of getting help to children and families early and where it is needed. Our Children's Centres are all on plan – two are already nationally accredited and six more are due to be open by April. We will also be developing four new centres reaching into more rural communities by 2011. It is clear that getting early support is working – there is a 25% reduction in numbers of children coming into care 2006/7 and although the care population has increased slightly, this is only because young people are staying longer and not leaving

care at 16 any more. I campaigned for this over thirty years ago and it is good to see that it is at last happening. We have the largest group ever of 16/17 year olds still living in our professional foster homes, which has to be good in preparing them to be responsible future citizens.

Great progress has been made in ensuring that children are active. We can show excellent performance against national expectations - 90% 5-16 year olds were doing two hours PE in 2006/7, a 19% increase on the previous year and the progress continues. There is also clear evidence of greater engagement by young people in volunteering and the performing arts.

Strong partnerships are our basis for improvement. The YorOK Children's Trust Board and the Safeguarding Board are good examples of this. The Children and Young People's Plan describes clearly our aspirations for children and young people and the shared priorities within the Plan are being addressed with the external validation of our progress undertaken through Ofsted. At this moment it is not possible to give full details of APA scores as they are as embargoed but we can say that the assessments of Children's Services will make a maximum contribution to the overall judgements on the council and places us in top 10% of authorities in country

Finally, I would like to thank all the children, young people, parents and school staff who support and encourage success in aspects of children's lives. Without them, and without the dedication of the central team of officers, we would not have the very successful service that is in place today.

Carol Runciman.