

Joint Area Review (JAR) of Services for Children and Young People in Worcestershire

JAR newsletter | September 2008

We have now completed the onsite fortnight of our Joint Area Review. The inspectors carried out a series of interviews, focus groups and site visits and are now reviewing the evidence collected as part of the investigations of services provided to children and young people in Worcestershire.

My thanks go to all who have been involved with the JAR, whether in the preparations and all the work leading up to the inspection itself or taking part in a focus group or interview.

Preparing for this inspection has been a massive task, and all should be proud of themselves for the effort, determination and hard work that has been invested.

Our final grade will be published later in the year so watch this space for the big news.

Richard Hubbard

Director of Children's Services



Onsite Fieldwork fortnight

The inspectors finished the fieldwork on 11th July and provided the Council with some initial feedback. This was provided in confidence, and therefore the details unfortunately cannot be shared. This is because the inspectors still have further desk-top analysis to undertake, and their assessment will go through both a quality assurance and moderation process. We will receive a draft report on 17th September, with comments required by 1st October and the final report in November.

The scale of the exercise was enormous:

- 40 focus groups were seen by inspectors - over 200 people were part of these focus groups. These focus groups involved staff from all partner agencies including the PCT, County Council, District Councils, Schools Police, Connexions and the Voluntary and Community Sector and included all levels of staff from senior strategic managers to front line staff. Focus groups took place on a range of topics, for example healthy schools, multi agency staff working with children with LDD, parent and carer councils, multi agency staff for targeted early intervention and middle managers working in child protection in children's social care.
- The inspectors were based at County Hall, and visited 25 other locations as well. Sites visited included Vale of Evesham Special School, a positive activities youth inclusion project for LDD at Perdiswell Young People's Club, Hill View Children's Home and Cherry Trees Children's Centre to name but a few.

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Onsite Fieldwork fortnight (continued)

- Inspectors spoke to over 130 children and young people and around 60 parents and carers.
- In total 136 meetings took place over the fieldwork fortnight.
- The inspectors read over 300 documents during the fieldwork fortnight.

The inspectors were keen to pass on their thanks for everyone's involvement. They said they had found all staff across all partners to be friendly, helpful, and open and commented positively on the level of commitment to improving lives for children and young people. To this should be added thanks to those people not directly involved, but whose efforts made it possible for other colleagues to engage positively with the inspectors.

Feedback

Although we cannot provide any detailed feedback, it is fair to say that we were already aware of a lot of the messages we received from the inspectors. The inspectors focused on impact and it was evident that everyone was largely able to demonstrate this – this is particularly welcome, as it shows that in Worcestershire we clearly understand that it is the difference we make that matters.

A large number of positives were noted across all services, and some areas were described in the verbal feedback as 'outstanding'. The final report will reflect the verbal feedback and the further desktop analysis. Overall the strength of partnership working in Worcestershire was recognised, including the strength of safeguarding arrangements. The inspectors were impressed with the commitment to narrowing the gap and how this was reflected across all services. They noted we are at comparatively early stages in joint commissioning but recognised we are well placed to make the necessary progress. Some services were identified as areas for continued improvement.

Other areas we expect to be highlighted are:

breadth of leisure and recreational opportunities for children and young people with learning difficulties/disabilities; being more proactive to tackle equality and diversity issues; more systematic approach to performance management; improved communication across the whole of the VCS.

Looking ahead

The inspectors will provide recommendations for action, divided into 'immediate', 'within 6 months' and 'longer term'. The CYPSP and its constituent partners will consider these and there will be action plans to take these forward – so this is not the end, but the beginning. In future years, all partners performance will be judged through the Comprehensive Area Assessment, and the progress we make on the recommendations from the JAR will be a key part of this.