

Children's Select Committee

Ofsted Annual Conversation 11 November 2020

Under the ILACS (Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services) inspection framework Ofsted holds an '**annual conversation**' with local authorities, this is a formal discussion, in which the LA is required to share a self -evaluation and up to date performance information.

This power-point includes a summary of the key information that Ofsted included in their letter to the Council following the meeting in November.

Social Care

Ofsted reports that Wiltshire:

- Has a stable and experienced workforce, and a low reliance on agency staff. Similarly, the senior leadership team in Wiltshire is highly experienced and long serving.
- Has not needed to implement revised practice standards as a result of Covid, and the only flexibilities applied were those in relation to fostering panels. In common with many other authorities, Wiltshire saw an initial drop in contacts and referrals, but these have since increased and are now back to pre Covid-19 levels. During the current crisis Wiltshire has been proactive in promoting children's visibility to the public.
- Has taken action in response to the recommendations from the last Ofsted inspection, and report that this has had a positive impact in relation to health services for children in care and referrals from individuals who are providing private fostering arrangements.
- Has positive, and improving, performance data. Ofsted did question the proportion of children subject to section 47 enquiries who do not go on to become subject of an initial child protection plan. We confirmed that performance was within our expected parameters and stronger than both Eng and Stat Neighbours average) .
- Has strong placement stability for children in care and that most children live with foster carers. Ofsted were interested to hear about our current foster carer recruitment campaign to develop the local in-house fostering service. Ofsted agreed it is important that children living away from home in stable placements are not moved without good reason.
- Ofsted were interested to hear about the new or developing work being undertaken in Wiltshire for example, the family led review of child protection processes and work with fathers, and have asked for feedback on this with a view to sharing learning regionally.

Early Years

Ofsted reports that Wiltshire:

- Has been successful in ensuring that every child who needed an early years place in the first lockdown period was able to access one and that there has been a successful return to settings with 86% of early years settings now open.
- Is monitoring the impact of the pandemic on settings carefully. The 'Team around the setting' approach is being implemented to support increased attendance and to ensure vulnerable children have continued access to early education.
- Has seen a drop in the uptake of funded early education. Just over 200 less two-year-olds and 300 less three-year-olds are accessing their entitlement compared to last year. Wiltshire believe that some families are anxious about sending their children to a setting and are choosing to keep them at home instead. Officers are working with children's social care colleagues and using communication via social media to increase parental awareness of the benefits of early education.
- Reports that the financial viability of settings is a cause for concern. While settings currently continue to be funded at 2019 rates, the drop in take-up will impact on the level of funding some settings receive next year. Wiltshire are preparing for this by working with local colleges to develop an early years workforce strategy. This strategy promotes early education as a viable a career option and aims to improve staff retention in the sector.

Education

Ofsted reports that Wiltshire:

- Has been a strong, collaborative approach from all stakeholders, including leaders of multi-academy trusts. Wiltshire has provided schools with support and advice with concerns such as dealing with outbreaks, risk assessment and remote learning.
- Has put a strong emphasis on ensuring that vulnerable pupils are in school. Leaders are playing their part and reporting attendance daily to the local authority. Over time, there was a steady increase in attendance of vulnerable groups during the summer term. Rates of attendance for all pupils are currently above the national average.
- Has focused on strengthening inclusion in schools. This includes keeping a close watch on school exclusions. Secondary schools have committed to ensuring that there are no permanent exclusions. Wiltshire has recently agreed to give secondary school leaders control over deciding how funding will be used to support pupils who need alternative provision. In primary schools, there have been no permanent exclusions this term, however, up until this point there had been an increase over the last academic year.
- Is continuing its work to review Wiltshire's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) inclusion strategy. Partners, including schools, have worked to identify three priorities. These rightly focus on ensuring that children's wide-ranging needs are fully met, that inclusion and children's well-being is at the heart of work, and that pupils make good progress and benefit from well-planned transitions.
- In further education and skills, there is a focus on supporting the most vulnerable young people. Those most at risk of dropping out from education and employment have been identified and are provided with bespoke support to highlight pathways that get these young people back into education or employment. Adapted careers advice is online and available to support young people at this time.