

Charter Mark Health Check Report

Leeds Parent Partnership

Charter Mark Review Report

Leeds Parent Partnership

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Crowther Place
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Date of On-site Review: 1 April 2009

Assessment Criteria: Charter Mark

Assessor: Martin Brewis

Result: Ongoing compliance with the Charter Mark Standard was demonstrated.

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1. Executive Summary

At the on-site review, Leeds Parent Partnership demonstrated continuing compliance with the Charter Mark standard and remained enthusiastically committed to the Charter Mark ethos. In addition progress has been made on the Charter Mark Action Plan developed after the previous assessment.

At the conclusion of the assessment a number of areas for improvement were identified, these are recorded in the Action Plan section of this report.

**“We are pleased to confirm that
Leeds Parent Partnership
has demonstrated ongoing compliance
with the Charter Mark Standard”**

As the next stage of the process we would ask you to develop an Action Plan for each of the areas of partial non-compliance; these areas will be assessed at your next Charter Mark Review.

2. Method of Health Check

Your Charter Mark certification is valid for three years. As part of your continuous certification we undertake an annual Health Check assessment to ensure that you maintain on-going compliance with the standard.

This review focused on the themes of :

Performance & Business Planning

The assessment was based on a Self Assessment submission which gave details of how your service is continuing to meet the standard and improvement and changes that have occurred.

The review was carried out in three stages:

- An assessment of evidence to support the progress of your Action Plan
- Review of Self Assessment submission
- Service delivery review

During the Health Check process the Charter Mark criteria are scored on a four-band scale:

Best Practice – All aspects of the element are met, and the applicant can demonstrate that they have gone beyond the requirements.

Full Compliance – All aspects of the element are met.

Partial Compliance – Some but not all aspects of the element are met and remedial action to meet the remainder could be put in place within a short period of time (maximum of three months).

Major Non-Compliance – None of the requirements of the element are met, or the assessor concludes that remedial action to address those elements that are not met will require a timescale in excess of three months.

3. Action Plan

This section of the report outlines the partial non-compliances identified during the assessment. These points now form your new Action Plan. You will be asked to present evidence that you have progressed these at your next Health Check.

Partial compliances carried forward from previous assessment.

4.3.4 The website contains the complaints and compliments policy and procedure, and the database records details of them. But there is as yet no evidence of the same practices with suggestions to ensure full compliance with this element.

4.3.5 There is as yet no clear evidence on the website or elsewhere of your publishing information on the number and type of complaints, compliments and suggestions you receive, along with any resulting improvements.

Partial compliances successfully closed at this review.

1.3.3 There is now good evidence of compliance with this element. The Advisory Board, which contains parent and partner representation, is made aware of the Service's performance. The website is now completely revamped and has much improved provision of information relevant to performance against standards.

- 1.3.4 Full compliance with this element is now met, since all the monitoring of the procedures to meet the Service standards has been adapted so as to be more understandable to the customers. Their comment was that the process was 'very helpful and informative'.
- 4.2.3 There is good evidence to show that parents have not only been involved in planning processes, eg the re-branding of the Service logo, and the production of leaflets for the Choice Advice and Parent Champion services, but also that they are happy with the outcomes.

Partial compliances raised at this review

- 6.2.4 There is no clear evidence to show that the Service's involvement in wider community activities is monitored and evaluated in order to incorporate what has been learned into future plans.

4. Observations

During the site assessment the following general observations were made. These can include positive observations of good practice and opportunities for improvement, seen over the entire assessment process: -

- The context of the Parent Partnership Service is that it is at arm's length from Education Leeds and is designed to help parents and carers of children with special educational needs receive impartial advice, information and guidance necessary for them to make the right choices for their child. The main changes since the initial assessment are the appointments of a Behaviour Support Officer to support parents and carers around the exclusions process, and of an Assistant Choice Adviser to enable that service to target super output areas. In addition, the Advisory Board, which includes several parent representatives, has been set up, and the role of the Parent Champion has been better established.

- In this first year Health Check the Parent Partnership Service (PPS) has been found to be in good health in relation to the two focus issues: business planning and performance. The partial compliances have been reduced to only three. At the same time this report includes some opportunities for development, in the spirit of smartening the Service for as and when it transitions to the Customer Service Excellence standard.
- In terms of business planning, the 2008-2009 Team Plan outlined the key objectives and the developments in the 2009-2010 Plan have been reviewed and approved by the Advisory Board. The holders of the new positions in the Service have standards to work to. Some Customer Service standards have had the wording changed; some standards have been tightened, for example, telephone calls are automatically transferred to staff mobiles to ensure 100% response; and all the standards have been published to customers. In addition, the Service Evaluation Report 2008 and benchmarking enables the Advisory Board to monitor Service performance and review/raise standards.
- Officers and frontline staff are actively involved in planning the Service. In particular, they planned and implemented the services of the Choice Advisor and the Parent Champion. They also played a large part in the planning and delivery of the SEN Market Place Event, which is progressing from a one-off to an annual event. The Parent Champion plans a six-week timescale to deliver a report to parents and carers, the Headteacher, School Improvement Service and Governors, for schools which are in special measures or other Ofsted category.
- The parents on the Advisory Board have been involved in planning the wording and format for the branding of the new logo. It is interesting to note that the parents are happy that the new logo does not match the corporate image of Education Leeds, which signifies their confidence in the arm's length PPS. They have also been involved in the production of leaflets for the Choice Advice and Parent Champion services.

- There are good examples of Service planning based on the costings of proposed developments. In order to raise the confidence of parents in the Service, the protocol has been followed to re-brand the Service using three companies to submit tenders for a new logo. A new database has been established to process tenders from the costing team. All policies are now on the website and reviewed annually by the Advisory Board. In addition, members of staff have been trained to facilitate 'Appreciating the Difference', a training programme for new staff to Education Leeds on how to appreciate the diversity within the workplace and work effectively in teams, especially for special educational needs.
- The website contains the policy and procedure for handling complaints. The database records details of complaints and compliments, but there remains the necessity to do the same with suggestions. There is a further need to publish on the website or elsewhere information on the number and type of complaints, compliments and suggestions you receive, along with any resulting improvements.
- It is worth mentioning a good example of planning to improve value for money and keep costs down: a 'buddy system' for visits to parents and carers has proved to be poor use of staff time, so following the introduction of a 'safety device' system, a 2-month trial has taken place to record the difference in cost-effectiveness.
- With reference to Criterion 6, the fact that a number of staff members are involved in a range of wider community activities shows there is an implicit senior management approval for this commitment. However, there remain two opportunities: i) to make a more explicit statement of the Service commitment; ii) to create a structure and organisation to show that the Service's involvement in wider community activities is monitored and evaluated in order to incorporate what has been learned into future plans.

- The performance of the Service appears to be sound over the last year. Quarterly RAG statistics monitor, evaluate and inform the target areas to be reviewed. A new Parent Involvement Record shows customer contact activity and outcomes. A DCSF National Evaluation Report on the Choice Advice Service strengthens the focus on referrals and gives good information to customers; although there is no specific mention of Leeds PPS, it is identifiable as having 'leading practice'. Evaluation reports show the performance at the end of stage1 and 2 referrals. The Advisory Board provides a new monitoring process which is complemented by the Evaluation Reports and benchmarking by the National Parent Partnership Network. National benchmarking shows PPS is below average on expenditure per head, per parent/carer and funding for FSM, but achieves good performance.
- There are good examples of cost-effective partnership arrangements. The Market Place event was joint funded by the Children's Information Service (The Family Hub), the Social Care Service, different SILC's and parents. The Choice Advice Service has Independent Parent Advisors who are volunteer parents trained to support other parents at admissions appeals. The Behaviour Officer has through Business in the Community trained twelve trainee solicitors to be parent advocates for those attending exclusions appeals. The Advisory Board is made aware of performance. It is noted that the website has been completely revamped and has much improved its provision of information relevant to performance against standards. There is now the opportunity to use other means to publish this information, for example, in the newsletter 'A Brighter Future'.
- Satisfaction levels amongst those using the Service are generally high. Appropriate surveys are used, including oral feedback. However, to repeat last year's comment, the Service could do more to present data on levels of satisfaction including the trends in a format that is easier to understand and follow by others outside the Service. There is also the opportunity to take action on lower levels of satisfaction, depending on the reasons. The financial arrangements of the Service are sound, and benchmarking indicates good cost-effectiveness.

- The rest of this report reflects the views of staff, partners and 'customers' of the Service which the Assessor met during the visit.

Staff feel that there are good processes for induction, training, supervision and performance review. They display a high commitment to the Service.

Partners state that the quality assurance of the Team Plan together with its monitoring has improved dramatically, such that it is smart, focused and deliverable to its own standards and those of Education Leeds. They are particularly impressed by the consistent impartiality of the advice that the Service gives to enable parents and carers to make their own choices and decisions. They also praise the facilitating initiative of training trainee solicitors and Parent Advocates to support parents to achieve the best outcomes in the appeals situation. There is a feeling that the Service should publicise what it has to offer more widely, maybe in a termly newsletter of its own making.

Parents and carers comment in glowing terms about the advice and support they receive from Service personnel which gives them real confidence to attend meetings and put forward their views and wishes. They state that they feel 'really valued, never belittled', which enhances their self-esteem. Some parents/carers have now volunteered to be trained as Independent Parent Advisors, and as part of the 'gentle mentoring' would welcome closer shadowing particularly in the early stages.

The other really noteworthy initiative is the establishment of the Advisory Board. In a short time this has allowed the parents in particular to have their voice heard in a more formalised way, as seen in certain activities eg the new logo and leaflets. Thus, it is largely a parent driven partnership which is growing in strength, indeed making the Service stronger, and is, in the words of one parent, 'setting a standard and model for others to follow'.

- In sum, the Parent Partnership Service is increasingly successful in discharging its challenging role on a day-to-day basis for parents and carers who are at the sharp end of problems. You are also very good at advising people, whether as either a customer or other service provider, on how not 'to get wound up'. The general view is that the you know what you are talking about, give correct information for parents to make good choices, but also put yourselves out, go the extra mile, make yourselves accessible and, in a word, be 'hospitable'.

5. Action Planning

The achievement of Charter Mark is an on-going activity and it is important that the Parent Partnership Service continues to meet the requirements of the Charter Mark criteria throughout the three years that the mark is awarded. In addition the ethos of Charter Mark is that the organisation continually improves during this period.

As part of your on-going Charter Mark Health Check we look forward to reviewing the progress of the Action Plan and your continuous compliance with the standard in 12 months' time.

On-going review

SGS must be informed if the certificated service begins to receive a significant increase in customer complaints or critical press coverage.

If the organisation is in doubt we strongly recommend contacting the SGS Charter Mark Customer Care Team for advice on the significance of any service or organisation change or issues around customer complaints.

You should inform SGS of any major change in the service provision covered by the scope of the certificate. This includes reorganisation or mergers.

Report

SGS recommends that the Leeds Parent Partnership retains a copy of this report to aid continuous improvement and as a reference document for your next Health Check.