



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

# **Inspection report**

## **Walsall Youth Service**

Dates of inspection: 6 -10 December 2004

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## Introduction

Name of local authority:	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Name of chief officer:	David McNulty
Name and address of department in which the service is based:	Lifelong Learning and Community Directorate 2nd Floor, Norwich Union House 17 Lichfield Street Walsall WS1 1TU
Name of service:	Walsall Youth Service
Name of head of service:	Andy Driver
Reporting inspector:	Jenny Brown HMI
Dates of inspection:	6 -10 December 2004

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) conducts inspections of local authority youth services for young people aged up to 16 under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. For young people aged 16 to 19 the inspection remit is provided by section 61(2) of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Walsall is a Metropolitan Borough Council (WMBC), and is part of the Black Country conurbation. It has a population of 253,000, which has been declining for the last ten years. There are 23,700 young people in the 13 to 19 age group, approximately 18% of whom are of black and minority ethnic origin. Unemployment, teenage pregnancy and crime rates are all above national averages. The borough is a mixture of urban, suburban and rural communities some of which have high levels of deprivation. Some 45% of the population live in wards that are in the top 10% of the national index of multiple deprivation. There are also areas of significant affluence within the borough.

The youth service is located in the Lifelong Learning and Community Directorate of the local authority. There is a long established approach to youth work in Walsall based largely on autonomous community associations, part funded by the local authority. In 2003 a new structure which strengthened the central team, was agreed to by the council. Central staff are relatively new to their post and seven posts are unfilled. There are currently four full-time equivalent (fte) management staff, 12 fte youth workers and 60 sessional staff directly employed by WMBC. Community associations employ their own staff who are largely part-time. Five Local Authority staff are seconded full-time to specific associations. The service's core budget for 2004-5 is £2,903,898, representing 2% of the education budget.

During the inspection week, inspectors carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions in a range of settings, held structured discussions with members of staff, senior officers, elected members and partner organisations and reviewed a sample of service documentation. Some time was allocated to the evaluation of work which the service identified as good practice.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### *Effectiveness and value for money*

The weaknesses of the service significantly outweigh its strengths. There are significant weaknesses in achievement, youth work practice, curriculum and management that make this an inadequate service that provides unsatisfactory value for money.

#### *Strengths*

Achievement is good in those few programmes that set challenging targets and promote high standards. Young people gain from opportunities to participate in local democratic activities through the Youth Opinions Unite forums. Elected members and recently appointed senior managers recognise the weaknesses of the service and the challenges it faces and are taking robust action to address them. The new Head of Service has brought good leadership and considerable energy to the service at a time of change and staff are better supported by central managers.

#### *Weaknesses*

Standards of young people's achievement and the quality of youth work practice are inconsistent across the borough and a significant amount of work is inadequate. Too many sessions are largely recreational in nature and lacking in identified purposes and outcomes. A legacy of weak strategic leadership and poor accountability of the long established approach to providing youth work in Walsall has had an adverse effect on standards. Needs assessment and strategic targeting of provision are underdeveloped. The curriculum is narrow and significant gaps exist in provision for targeted groups. There are insufficient skilled and qualified members of staff to implement and manage the curriculum. Staff awareness of inclusion and diversity issues and their responsibilities for health and safety, including child protection arrangements is low.

### Key aspect inspection grades

	Key aspect	Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	4
	Quality of youth work practice	4
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	4
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	4

*The table above shows overall grades about provision. Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale: Very Good (1), Good (2), Adequate (3) and Inadequate (4).*

**Recommendations**

The council should:

- raise the standards of achievement of young people
- improve the overall quality of youth work practice
- broaden the curriculum
- increase the proportion of trained staff
- improve needs analysis and the strategic targeting of resources
- ensure all young people and workers are guaranteed a safe working environment
- embed quality assurance arrangements and accountability systems in all aspects of the work of the service.

## **Part B: Commentary on the key aspects**

### **Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice**

1. Standards of young people's achievement are inadequate. In a small number of sessions there were good examples of achievement and evidence of young people acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding. In these sessions workers combined social, educational and recreational elements well. This resulted in young people enjoying youth work, but also being able to develop, for example, decision making skills through their participation in a local youth forum and creativity skills through drama activities. Young people relate well to each other and to youth workers. Accredited frameworks such as the Youth Challenge Award and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) are a useful support for planning in some sessions but overall opportunities for young people to gain accreditation are limited. When they were provided, for example at the Blackwood Youth Club, young people who were involved spoke with enthusiasm and confidence about how they had tackled and met the challenges set for them.
  2. In too many sessions, however, worker's aspirations and expectations of what young people can achieve were low. In many sessions the work was unstructured, unfocused or largely recreational and provided young people with inadequate opportunities to undertake new learning and to take part in stimulating and challenging opportunities that develops their confidence and maturity.
  3. A clear and comprehensive framework to enable the voice of young people in the borough to be heard is in place. Youth Opinions Unite, a borough wide forum, is effectively raising some young people's awareness of political structures and processes and their use in negotiating social and political change. Opportunities for young people to be involved in local decision making and develop community responsibility, however, are limited. When they are involved young people, respond positively to the responsibilities placed upon them, show a heightened commitment to their centres and communities and increase their self confidence and political awareness. For example, at the Rosehill Youth Centre young people showed a mature understanding of the role of their club in providing positive activities for young people within the community. They demonstrated good organizational and collaborative skills while discussing fund raising ideas and planning improvements to club facilities.
  4. The quality of youth work practice is inadequate. Rapport and relationships between youth workers and young people are generally good but in too many sessions these positive foundations are not used to support effective learning. In the better practice youth workers understand the need to plan with young people and to provide them with relevant, challenging and stimulating experiences. Skilful engagement with young people in detached work in Chuckery is enabling trust to be established and issues of concern to be identified by workers. In many sessions there is a lack of planning and evaluation by staff and young people. Processes for recording young people's learning are underdeveloped. Too many staff lack the skills necessary to provide, or support others in the provision of good practice. Many staff work in isolation from each other and there is little sharing of good practice
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**Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources**

5. The quality of the curriculum and provision is inadequate and fails to provide young people with a broad range of opportunities. Needs assessment and the strategic targeting of provision are underdeveloped across the service. Moreover significant gaps exist in work for specific groups such as young women, young people at risk of disaffection and disengagement from education and training, young people from black and minority ethnic communities and gay and lesbian young people. Many more young men attend youth provision than young women.

6. The recently produced curriculum framework is a useful document to support curriculum planning and the evaluation of youth work. It is underpinned by a clear rationale and identifies themes that reflect local and national priorities and provides examples of how these can be turned into learning activities. Nevertheless, there is a lack of consensus in the borough about what constitutes youth work and not all community associations and voluntary organisations see the relevance of the new framework so its impact on practice has been limited. In addition many members of staff, particularly part-time workers, have received insufficient practical support to enable them to implement the new framework.

7. The service promotes equality, inclusion and diversity in a number of ways, for example, through the appointment of a specialist worker for learning difficulties. Detached work provides a good model for reaching groups of young people who are either not able to access youth club provision or who chose not to. Race Relations policies are in place but there is little curriculum activity specifically targeted at addressing racism and the promotion of positive race relations. There is a general lack of awareness by workers of these issues.

8. Too few skilled and qualified staff are available to effectively manage and implement the curriculum. Many part-time members of staff are either unaware of, or unable to participate in staff training activities some of which are held during the day and clash with other commitments. The deployment of staff in several centres is high in relation to the number of young people attending and the nature of the learning activities provided.

9. The quality of accommodation is variable. Although some youth work takes place in attractive, well equipped buildings, much takes place in accommodation which is shared with other members of the community and is not always welcoming to young people. The authority is late in determining compliance with the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act 2001 (SENDA). An audit has recently been undertaken but an action plan to resolve issues arising has not yet been drawn up. The use of specialist resources, such as information technology (IT), to support the curriculum and young people's learning and achievement is poor.

**Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management**

10. Strategic and operational leadership and management are inadequate. Elected members and recently appointed senior managers are taking robust action to address a legacy of weak strategic leadership. They recognise the weaknesses in the service and the challenges it faces. Recent actions to improve this situation are beginning to have an effect, for example the application of the curriculum framework and quality assurance systems.



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Although arrangements for the provision of youth work are long established there is no clear and agreed consensus about the learning outcomes to be achieved. This situation is compounded by a shortage of appropriately qualified staff.

11. Local authority funding of the service has improved significantly over the last three years but from a very low base. External funding has fallen sharply over the same period. Currently resources are not matched to need across the service and budget allocations are largely historical. The effectiveness of delegating over 70% of the budget to community associations and voluntary organisations has been insufficiently monitored over time and has resulted in the local authority being unable to target resources to its own priorities.

12. The service demonstrates its commitment to equality and diversity through a range of appropriate policies and the appointment of a number of specialist workers, but the lack of systematic and strategic analysis of the needs of all young people results in limited appropriate provision for significant groups of young people. Processes enabling officers and elected members to be regularly informed of service performance in relation to race, equality and inclusion do not exist. Young people are insufficiently involved in the governance and management of the service and in determining provision.

13. Partnership work at a strategic level is satisfactory. The Youth service is represented on key strategic groups such as the Walsall Children and Young People's Strategic partnership. At an operational level, partnership work, including that with the Connexions Service, is underdeveloped. Although there are some good individual examples of multi-agency working, as demonstrated by the summer programme, they do not form part of a coherent approach.

14. Young people and workers are not guaranteed a safe working environment. Workers' awareness of their responsibilities for health and safety is poor and a number of concerns were raised during the inspection about health and safety. Some staff are unclear about child protection procedures and have not undertaken recent training.

15. The recently appointed head of service is providing good leadership and bringing considerable energy to tackling the many areas for improvement. Staff feel well supported both by the head of service and other central managers. Nonetheless the complex arrangements for managing part-time staff and the inconsistency with which supervision and appraisal procedures are implemented are not driving up standards and have resulted in some staff being poorly supported.

16. The scrutiny of the quality of provision and the use of resources although weak is improving. The self assessment report is largely accurate. Quality assurance systems are now in place and practice is beginning to be observed systematically. In a small number of instances this has resulted in improved practice. However a legacy of weak strategic leadership and poor accountability of the long established approach to providing youth work in Walsall has resulted in the local authority not playing the lead role that it should. The authority is insufficiently able to direct and assure the quality of the work for which it is accountable. This has had an adverse impact on the quality of youth work, the curriculum and standards of achievement and makes this an inadequate service providing unsatisfactory value for money.

## Youth Service Indicators

**Table 1: Youth population 13-19 (in 1000s)**

	2003	2002
LEA	23.7	23.4

Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS) - Mid Year population Estimate (MYE)

1. The ONS's Mid Year population Estimate takes the most recent Census figure and estimates the births, deaths and migrations (etc.) that have taken place since that time. The above data estimates the population in this Local Authority in June 2003 and June 2002. The original 2002 estimate was revised and re-published in September 2004, and it is the revised figure that is shown here.

**Table 2: Youth population 13-19 by ethnicity (in 1000s and %s)**

	LEA 2001	LEA 2001 %	England 2001 %
White - British, Irish & Other White Background	18.5	79.2	86.7
Asian or Asian British	3.8	16.1	6.8
Black or Black British	0.3	1.5	2.8
Mixed	0.6	2.7	2.4
Other <sup>1</sup>	0.1	0.4	1.2
All	23.3	100.0	100.0

Source: Office of National Statistics. 2001 Census Commissioned Table. Crown copyright 2004. Crown copyright material is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO.

1. In order to protect against the inadvertent disclosure of information relating specifically to an identified person, some ethnic categories cannot be presented separately within Census material. These categories are therefore included in the Other category in this table. This category includes Chinese persons.

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**Table 3: Net expenditure on youth service**

	2003-04	2002-03	Change £	Change %
Net Expenditure on Youth Service	1,171,699	1,737,510	-565,811	-32.6
Other Funding Expenditure	928,778	250,305	678,473	271.1
Gross Expenditure	2,100,477	1,987,815	112,662	5.7

Other Funding as % of gross	44.2	12.6	n/a	n/a
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Source: NYA audit

**Table 4: Youth service finance**

	2004-05	2003-04	Change £	Change %
Total Education Budget	147,703,422	158,328,659	-10625,237	-6.7
Youth & Community Sub block Budget	3,225,517	2,914,439	311,078	10.7
Youth Service Net Budget	2,903,898	1,312,384	1,591,514	121.3

Source: DfES – Section 52

**Table 5: Youth service budget as % of the total education budget**

	2004-05	2003-04
LEA	2.0%	0.8%
England - median value <sup>1</sup>	n/a	1.3%
England - range of values <sup>2</sup>	n/a	0.4% to 6.8%

Source: DfES – Section 52

1. The median value is the middle value of the %s of all 150 Local Authorities in England.
2. The range of values shows the highest and lowest %s for individual Local Authorities in England.

**Table 6: Youth service budget as % of the youth & community sub block budget**

	2004-05	2003-04
LEA	90%	45%
England - median value <sup>1</sup>	n/a	71.6%
England - range of values <sup>2</sup>	n/a	18.2% to 107.9%

Source: DfES – Section 52

1. The median value is the middle value of the %s of all 150 Local Authorities in England.
2. The range of values shows the highest and lowest %s for individual Local Authorities in England.

**Table 7: % of young people aged 13-19 reached by youth service**

	2003-04	2002-03	DfES Benchmark %
LEA <sup>1</sup>	29.7	20.7	25.0%

Source: Walsall Local Authority

1. % reached = no. of 13-19 year olds reached by Youth Services/total youth population 13-19 year olds.

**Table 8: % of young people aged 13-19 participating in youth work**

	2003-04	2002-03	DfES Benchmark %
LEA <sup>1</sup>	n/a	n/a	15.0%

Source: Walsall Local Authority

1. % participating = no. of 13 -19 year olds participating in youth work/total youth population 13-19 year olds.

**Table 9: Net budget per young person aged 13-19**

	2004-05	2003-04	Change £	Change %
LEA	£122.79	£55.49	£67.30	121.3%

Source: DfES-S52/ONS

1. Population data are taken from the ONS's Mid Year population Estimate of June 2003.

**Table 10: Net Cost of each young person reached in 13-19 group**

	2003-04	2002-03	Change £	Change %
LEA	£166.74	£354.96	-£188.22	-55.0

Source: NYA audit

1. Net cost per young person reached = net expenditure on Youth Service (excluding Other Funding) / number of 13-19 year olds reached.

2. The number of young people reached only includes the key age group of 13-19 year olds, although it is acknowledged that other young people in the 11 – 25 year old age group may have used the service during the year. The net spend is the total figure, and no attempt has been made to isolate the amount spent on 13-19 year olds within it.

**Table 11: Number of full-time equivalent youth workers**

	2003-04	2002-03	Change	Change %
Youth Workers (FTE)	31.2	22.5	8.7	38.7

Source: NYA audit

**Notes**