

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0161 618 8207  
Direct F 0161 618 8514  
North\_apa@ofsted.gov.uk



17 December 2008

Mr Nick Hudson  
Director of Children and Young People's Services  
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council  
Progress House  
Westwood Park Drive  
Wigan, WN3 4HH

Dear Mr Hudson

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council 2008**

This letter summarises the findings of the 2008 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council. The evaluations and judgements in the letter draw on a range of data and information which covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. As you know, the APA is not based on an inspection of your services and, therefore, can only provide a snapshot based on the evidence considered. As such, I am grateful to you for assuring the quality of the data provided.

Performance is judged on a four point scale as detailed in the handbook. I should emphasise that the grades awarded are based on an overall 'best fit' model. For instance, an outstanding judgement of Grade 4 reflects that overall most aspects, but not necessarily all, of the services in the area are working very well. We know that one of the features of outstanding provision is the drive for greater improvement and no council would suggest, and nor would Ofsted, that a judgement of outstanding indicates that everything is perfect. Similarly within a judgement of inadequate overall, Grade 1, there could be some aspects of the overall service that are adequate or even good. Judgements are made in a rounded way, balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to outcomes, local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.



The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale  
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

## Overall effectiveness of children’s services

Grade 3

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council delivers services for children and young people that exceed minimum requirements and are good overall. Its capacity to improve is good as is the management of services. Good progress has been made in responding to the recommendations of the joint area review and since the 2007 APA, the council has improved performance in staying safe and all five outcome areas are now good. Effective progress has been made in improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people, especially the youngest, looked after children, young people at risk of offending and those with learning difficulties/and or disabilities. Performance is above national figures in Early Years and at GCSE. The number of 16- to 18-year-olds not in employment, education or training has reduced. Some strategies have been particularly effective in making inroads into intractable issues, including the reduction of persistent absenteeism. Changes in ways of working, along with the closer integration of services and rigorous analysis of where best to target resources, pave the way for the pace of improvement to accelerate. However, outcomes have not improved significantly in all areas and an upward trend is not yet established in relation to assessment performance. The council acknowledges that aspects of service delivery require further improvement. Reducing teenage pregnancy, re-offending and attainment in English remain areas for development. Improvement in performance in English has stalled at Key Stage 1 and at Key Stage 3, standards have fallen below the national average.

## Being healthy

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strong partnership working, strategic planning and intelligent use of local data across all outcomes.</li> <li>▪ Some 90% of schools are participating in the Healthy School Standard and all have achieved accreditation.</li> <li>▪ Progress towards a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service is self-assessed as good and waiting times are better than the national average.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Despite a marked improvement in 2007/8, teenage conception rates remain well above similar councils and the national average.</li> <li>▪ One looked after child in four does not have an annual health assessment.</li> </ul>

## Staying safe

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Effective action to improve significantly the proportion of initial and core assessments and the timeliness of initial assessments. These are now similar to statistical neighbours. This was a key area for improvement in the 2007 APA.</li> <li>▪ Numbers of children adopted from care and timeliness of placements are better than similar areas and nationally.</li> <li>▪ High numbers of children and young people live in stable long-term placements.</li> <li>▪ The fostering and adoption services were judged to be good this year.</li> <li>▪ Good support for those experiencing bullying and domestic abuse.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Despite improvements this year, the number of core assessments completed within 35 days is below similar areas.</li> <li>▪ A low number of common assessment frameworks were completed in 2007/08, although training in their use is widely available.</li> </ul>

## Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. This is in line with the council's self-assessment. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More children aged five achieve 78 points or more than nationally in the Foundation Stage profile. Targeted support for the lowest 20% has helped them to make up ground.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of young people gaining five more grades A* to C at GCSE is above the national figure for the first time. The gap has narrowed in relation to good passes including English and mathematics.</li> <li>▪ The attainment gap is closing for looked after children and young people, and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</li> <li>▪ No primary and very few secondary school children are excluded permanently.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Despite overall standards remaining average or above, results in English at Key Stages 1 and 3 fell for the second year running.</li> </ul>

## Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The views of children and young people have significantly shaped the Children and Young People's Plan and its priorities.</li> <li>▪ Children and young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are supported well by the youth service to take part in service planning and development and this has resulted in improvements.</li> <li>▪ Multi-agency action to prevent offending is effective; the number of first time offenders has reduced well in the last year and continues to be better than in similar areas and nationally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Re-offending rates have increased and are higher than comparable areas and nationally.</li> </ul>

## Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved outcomes at ages 16 and 19 in academic and vocational work. The increase in 2007/8 in the percentage of young people achieving Level 3 was higher than nationally.</li> <li>▪ Good progress in planning the collective delivery of 14–19 Diplomas and in offering a wide choice of pathways.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of young people in employment, education or training has risen, including young offenders, teenage parents and looked after young people. There is high uptake of the Education Maintenance Allowance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Despite an improvement in the last year, twice as many young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than nationally are not in employment, education and training.</li> </ul>

## Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 3

The council's capacity to improve and its management of children's services are good and in some aspects are even better. The ambitions of the council and the partnership are very challenging and priorities are sharply focused on weaker areas of performance. Children's services are a key priority for the council and the Children and Young People's Plan is closely aligned with the Local Area Agreement. The council's analysis of its strengths and the quality of service delivery is accurate. In considering its capacity to improve, the council has given insufficient weight to the need to show that it can sustain improvements and also deliver notable improvement in educational outcomes. For example, the reduction in teenage pregnancy and improvement in assessment performance are not yet secure. Strong leadership and effective action is generally closing the gap, particularly for vulnerable groups. Good attention is being given to the intelligent use of data to identify children and young people who are at particular risk. The council has a good track record of finding effective and often innovative solutions which offer good value for money and improve provision for children and young people of all ages. Strategic and financial planning is strong reflecting a continuing shift in culture towards fully integrated working and clearer accountability. Preventive measures and targeted resources to 'hot spots' are paying off in improved performance against national indicators, but the use of common assessment framework is not yet fully embedded.

### Major strengths

- Strong corporate leadership, vision and action ensure resources are aligned to areas of most need.
- The gap is narrowing in many outcomes for vulnerable children and young people because of effective partnership and team work, the targeting of hot spots, and a growing focus on preventive services.
- Good account is taken of the views of children and young people in deciding priorities which are reflected in the council's plan and Local Area Agreement.

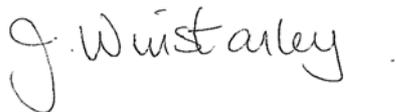
### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Not all action has resulted in secure and notable improvement in outcomes; for example, teenage pregnancy, timeliness of core assessments and attainment in English.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection