

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

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

Direct T 0117 945 6293  
Direct F 0117 945 6554  
South\_apa@ofsted.gov.uk



17 December 2008

Ms Margaret Goldie  
Corporate Director for Children and Young People  
West Berkshire Council  
Avonbank House  
West Street  
Newbury  
West Berkshire  
RG14 1BZ

Dear Ms Goldie

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in West Berkshire 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

West Berkshire Council consistently delivers good services. The council has made good progress in responding to most of the recommendations in the 2007 APA and in the joint area review report, published in December 2007, which judged local services for safeguarding, for looked after children, and for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to be good.

Outcomes for children and young people in each of the five Every Child Matters areas are good. Above average performance has been sustained or improved in most aspects. The council's contribution to improving the health of children and young people is good particularly for the most vulnerable groups. However, the proportion of schools that have already achieved Healthy School status is lower than the national average. Staying safe outcomes are good, with strong provision for looked after children through the 'Life Chances' team. Improvements have been made in the timeliness of initial and core assessments, and in the percentage of referrals that lead to initial assessments although there is still more to do. Good progress has been made in improving educational outcomes for children and young people, and in reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training. There has been an increase however, in final warnings/reprimands and convictions for looked after children.

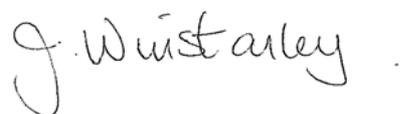
As in the previous year, the council's capacity to improve further, including the management of children's services, is good. There is strong and effective leadership in all aspects of the service although recruitment and retention of staff in some areas are challenging issues. Working in partnership with a wide range of external organisations is well-developed but there are limitations in the capacity of the voluntary and community sectors to contribute fully to the work of the Children's Trust. The Children and Young People's Plan is suitably ambitious. Performance management is good.

The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development is consistent with the evidence. There are no additional recommendations to make as a result of the APA.

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 as part of this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues in preparing for the assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection

## Major strengths and important weaknesses

Major strengths	Important weaknesses and areas for development
<p><b>Being healthy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The child and adolescent mental health service has improved with priority access for vulnerable groups.</li> <li>▪ Teenage pregnancy figures continue to decline and are on target to meet the 2010 figure.</li> <li>▪ Good multi-agency strategies target health issues such as smoking and obesity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Being healthy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ While improving, the proportion of schools achieving Healthy School status is below the national average.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Staying safe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The timeliness of looked after children's reviews has improved and is good.</li> <li>▪ Provision for looked after children through adoption, private fostering and residential accommodation is good; fostering is outstanding.</li> <li>▪ Child protection procedures are good overall and some aspects are very good.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Staying safe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The timeliness of initial and core assessments, and the percentage of referrals that lead to initial assessment, have improved but are not as good as those nationally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Enjoying and achieving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attendance and standards are above national averages and children and young people make good progress at school.</li> <li>▪ The educational achievement of looked after children has improved and is much better than found nationally and in similar councils.</li> <li>▪ Well-focused work to raise standards of writing in Key Stage 1 and overall standards in Key Stage 2 has shown a positive impact.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Enjoying and achieving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Permanent exclusions from secondary schools have declined but the percentage is still above the national average.</li> <li>▪ Standards in Key Stage 3, whilst above average, are not rising as fast as those nationally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Making a positive contribution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Looked after children have very good participation rates in their reviews, above those in similar areas and nationally.</li> <li>▪ The management and leadership of the youth offending team are excellent and the level of inter-agency working is impressive.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Making a positive contribution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Although the cohort is small, the number of final warnings/ reprimands and convictions of looked after children remains higher than those found nationally and in similar areas, and has increased since last year.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Achieving economic well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The proportions of young people achieving Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications by age 19 are increasing and continue to be above the national average and also above those in similar councils.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training has continued to decline and is below the national average.</li> <li>▪ The percentage of care leavers at age 19 living in suitable accommodation has increased and is above average for both nationally and similar areas.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Achieving economic well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The range of post-16 provision is still limited and lacks breadth.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Long-established strategic partnerships and multi-agency teams work effectively to drive and support the development of universal and targeted services.</li> <li>▪ Leadership is strong and effective in all aspects of children’s services.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Whilst good progress is being made on the long-term workforce strategy, capacity pressures exist in this small authority for council staff and partners thereby limiting the rate of improvement in a few areas.</li> </ul>