

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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

Direct T 0115 944 9193
Direct F 0115 944 9307
Midlands_apa@ofsted.gov.uk



17 December 2008

Mr Paul Greenhalgh
Director of Children's Services
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Civic Centre
Victoria Avenue
Southend-on-Sea
Essex
SS2 6ER

Dear Mr Greenhalgh

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Southend-on-Sea 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.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	2
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

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council consistently delivers a service above minimum requirements for children and young people. The council's capacity to improve, including service management, is good. The council carried out a 2008/09 'refresh' of its Children and Young People's Plan to incorporate the recommendations of both the 2007 JAR and the 2007 APA and good progress has been made in addressing these issues. Improvements have been sustained across a range of fronts, and the direction of travel is good. Outcomes relating to being healthy have improved and are now good. The council has a clear focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable children and young people and on closing the gap in educational attainment. The School Improvement Service is highly effective, providing clear challenge and good support to schools to improve provision and raise standards. Action to address young people's anti-social behaviour is a clear strength together with the multi-agency interventions offered by the Family Intervention Programme to support troubled families. Increasing numbers of children and young people are able to express their views, and contribute to decision making. Practice in helping looked after children make a positive contribution was judged to be excellent on inspection. As a result the area of making a positive contribution is now good. Integrated multi-agency working is well established and continues to be strong. Phase two of the children's centre programme has been completed with innovative partnership arrangements in well targeted locations. Opportunities for achieving economic well-being continue to be good, with some outstanding features. Practice and provision relating to staying safe have improved; good systems are in place, and early indications are that they are driving improvement, but it is too early to demonstrate that this improvement is sustained over time and this area remains adequate.

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.

Major strengths

- The council has improved its partnership working with children and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) stakeholders by strengthening the workforce, enabling further development of appropriate services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- All schools are participating in the Healthy School Initiative programme with more than half having achieved the Healthy School Award, and the council is on target to meet its December 2009 completion targets.
- Health outcomes for looked after children are good; their needs are identified effectively and met well.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The CAMHS strategy is under development, and some of the proposed changes are not fully embedded.
- The council's strategies to deter young people's involvement in substance misuse remain under continued development. The plans have yet to provide a significant impact on young people being discharged or moving between children's and adult services.

Staying safe

Grade 2

The contribution of the council to improving outcomes for children and young people in this area is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the area where progress has been made.

Major strengths

- Good systems are in place to share information about child protection priorities. The council has improved its systems for performance monitoring of child protection work across all agencies.
- All children with a child protection plan are allocated to a qualified social worker. Child protection plans are regularly reviewed and meet prescribed timescales.
- The number of looked after children placed in residential children's homes has been reduced, with a corresponding increase in the number of children placed in kinship care arrangements. The council has increased the number of foster placements available, thus increasing its range of fostering resources.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Safeguarding procedures have not been robust in all schools.
- Despite reductions in 2007–08, the council's social care referral rate remains relatively high compared with statistical neighbours. Suitable initiatives, including family support projects, have recently been put in place to reduce the volume of referrals.
- The percentage of children and young people with a child protection plan has increased and is higher than similar councils and national averages. Whilst this remains under the council's scrutiny, preventative services have yet to have an impact on the volume of initial child protection conferences or the numbers made subject to a child protection plan.
- The council has successfully reduced the proportion of looked after children over the age of ten years. Nevertheless, the council has the highest proportion in comparison with similar councils. Whilst there are detailed plans to maintain the steady decline in the numbers, these initiatives have not yet demonstrated a significant impact.
- The percentage of looked after children cases which were reviewed on time has

increased, but the council's figure remains lower than statistical neighbours and lower than the England average.

Enjoying and achieving

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.

Major strengths

- Highly effective school improvement service. Key features include very good use of data, leading to improved standards, particularly at targeted schools and clear evidence of narrowing the gap between schools with high deprivation and schools with a more comprehensive intake.
- Reduction in exclusion rates due to the use of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Literacy programme, improved use of stage 2 interventions and further training and development relating to use of the common assessment framework.
- Standards at Key Stage 4 are above national averages and rates of progress have improved.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Attendance rates in primary and some secondary schools, though improved, remain below those of statistical neighbours and national averages.
- Provision and outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are satisfactory, but they are not as strong as for other young people.

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.

Major strengths

- Effective multi-agency action has led to a reduction in anti-social behaviour and reduced offending.
- Young people's participation in decision making and in supporting the community has improved and is now strong, with looked after children making an outstanding contribution.
- Effective action taken to actively engage supervised juveniles in education, employment and training (EET).

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Re-offending rates have reduced but are still higher than statistical neighbours and national averages. ▪ Opportunities for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make a positive contribution are currently satisfactory, but they are fewer than for other young people. |
|--|

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.

Major strengths

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuing improvement in the percentage of young people in EET including those who are looked after, with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. ▪ Promotion of equality of opportunity in education and training is good, and it is outstanding in some aspects. ▪ Above average attainment at Level 2 and Level 3 at age 19 and above average success rates post-16. |
|---|

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Success rates in work based learning are below average, particularly for those young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. |
|--|

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

Grade 3

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people, including service management is good. The clearest indicator of this is the good progress it is currently making in its continued drive for improvement. Improvements include outcomes in relation to being healthy and the improved participation of children and young people in making a positive contribution. The progress of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is now being tracked and the analysis of this data is being used effectively to target provision. Fewer children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been excluded from schools. In addition, following a recent incident of non-compliance, the review of quality assurance procedures for safeguarding children and young people has led the council to strengthen its procedures in ensuring compliance in schools. The Children and Young People's Plan is driven by a clear aspiration to achieve excellence and action is effectively prioritised to achieve maximum impact. Improved performance management means that the council is aware of its areas of strength and relative weakness. Its self-assessment is accurate in relation to all outcomes with the

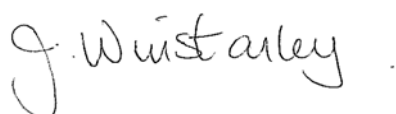
important exception of staying safe, and all the identified areas for development are appropriate and realistic.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Strong performance management.▪ Self-critical analysis of achievements and realistic but challenging targets for improvement.▪ Well embedded, effective Children's Trust arrangements with strong involvement of partners.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Some of the good strategies and procedures to ensure children and young people stay safe have yet to have a sustained positive impact on outcomes.▪ Services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which range from satisfactory to outstanding, are, as yet, too variable.

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



Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection