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17 December 2008

Ms Clair Pyper
Strategic Director of Education & Children Services
Slough Borough Council
Town Hall
Bath Road
Slough
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Dear Ms Pyper

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Slough 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	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

Slough Borough Council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. It delivers services which are consistently above minimum requirements, maintaining a good performance across all five Every Child Matters outcome areas. The educational standards attained by 11- to 19-year-olds continue to improve and are above national averages. Good progress has been made in response to the majority of areas identified in the 2007 APA letter. However, standards at Key Stage 2 have not improved, despite a range of actions by the council. There are also significant pressures on staffing, with too many unfilled teaching and social care posts.

Children and young people’s services have good capacity to improve further and are well managed. Senior officers are committed to meeting the sometimes complex needs of children and young people in the borough.

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good impact of work to reduce teenage conception rates. ▪ Good performance in the Healthy Schools Programme. ▪ Very good level of health assessments for looked after children.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services, although reducing, remain too long. ▪ Too many children do not think they receive good enough advice and information about sex and relationships.

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 in this outcome area is accurate but insufficient weight has been given to some important weaknesses where further development is needed. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good performance on delivering child protection plans. ▪ Good improvements in the timeliness of initial and core assessments, with initial assessments completed at a rate above that found in similar councils and nationally. ▪ The good quality of services for looked after children, including improved stability of placements which is very good when compared with numbers found in similar councils and nationally. ▪ Good quality fostering services and children’s homes, as shown by inspection. ▪ Although the percentage has risen slightly, the council has maintained low numbers of repeat referrals for services when compared with those found in similar councils and nationally.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The monitoring of safe recruitment practices is not fully developed and safer recruitment training is not embedded in children’s workforce development. ▪ Strategies to establish the identity and whereabouts of all children and young people are not demonstrating sufficient impact.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 have continued to improve. They are higher than the average standards attained by young people nationally. ▪ The council’s school improvement work is very effective and the quality of school provision is very high. ▪ Children and young people enjoy school. Attendance rates are better than those seen nationally and in similar councils. Standards of behaviour are good or outstanding in nearly all schools.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards at Key Stage 2 are below, and in some cases well below, national averages. ▪ The proportion of children leaving care with five or more higher GCSE grades has fallen significantly in recent years.

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

- The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system has fallen considerably and is lower than that seen in similar areas.
- Progress has been made in the way in which the council enables children and young people to participate in decision making and this aspect is now good.
- The proportion of looked after children communicating their views when their cases are reviewed has improved significantly in recent years. Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also have good opportunities to review and influence the services that they receive.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The proportion of young offenders engaged in education, employment or training fell in 2007-08 and was below the national average for this group of 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

- The proportion of young people who continue in learning beyond Year 11 is good: it has continued to increase and is above the national average. The proportion not engaged in employment, education or training is below average.
- Young people attain well. Their performance in Level 2 and 3 qualifications has improved significantly in recent years and is better than the average performance of young people nationally.
- The proportion of minority ethnic young people in employment, education and training is above average for this group. The proportion of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in employment, education and training is also above average.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of care leavers in employment, education or training has been below the national average for this group of young people for a number of years. ▪ The proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation is too low. |
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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 is good and its management of these services is good. The council has sustained its performance and made good improvements against a range of indicators. It continues to engage well with partners and is highly regarded by schools. The council knows itself well and the quality of its self-assessment is generally accurate but does not refer to a few significant areas where further development is needed. The council demonstrates good ambition, prioritisation and performance management. However, capacity is stretched and there remain pressures on services relating to the recruitment and retention of both teaching and social care staff. School standards at Key Stage 2 remain a significant area for improvement.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good leadership and management. ▪ The good engagement of the council with its partners, including children and young people. ▪ Sustained improvement and high performance in many aspects of both education and social care, for example educational standards at Key Stages 4 and 5. ▪ Highly effective improvement work with schools causing concern. |
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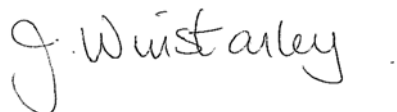
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sustained improvement has not been made in a number of key areas, for example in raising educational standards at Key Stage 2 and increasing the proportion of care leavers in employment, education and training. ▪ The number of unfilled social care posts has reduced but remains higher than found nationally or in similar councils. The percentage of unfilled full time teaching posts has risen and is above comparators. |
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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