

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



16 January 2009

Mrs Lynda Fisher
Strategic Director – Children, Families & Learning
Portsmouth City Council
3rd Floor, Civic Offices
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth
PO1 2BG

Dear Mrs Fisher

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Portsmouth City 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 primarily a desk-based assessment 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	2
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	2
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 2

The overall effectiveness of Portsmouth’s children’s services is adequate. The council has demonstrated good capacity in improving outcomes and these are now mostly in line with similar councils. It delivers services that are mostly above minimum requirements and has made reasonable progress in most of the areas identified in the 2007 APA letter. Health outcomes are generally good. Children and young people have an effective range of opportunities to participate in decision-making and the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training is steadily reducing. Safeguarding arrangements are adequate. There is effective multi-agency work to provide early intervention and support to families, but there are significant fluctuations in child protection performance which are being reviewed by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Standards of educational attainment remain below average for 11- to 19-year-olds. However, the gap between the performance of the council and that found nationally has closed at Key Stages 2 and 4.

Children and young people’s services have good capacity to improve further and are well managed, although capacity within social care services has been hampered by above average vacancy rates. The council is ambitious for children and young people in the area and has a clear focus on promoting inclusion and tackling disadvantage.

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>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-agency health promotion work which is effectively targeted at vulnerable groups of children and young people and leads to good outcomes. ▪ The broad range of health services available to looked after children and good support to foster carers and residential staff to meet the emotional health needs of children. Almost all looked after children have had annual health assessments. ▪ Good multi-agency support to children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which includes a very effective child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS).
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of children and young people in substance misuse treatment has remained low for three years.

Staying safe

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. We are unable to agree with the council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area. We set out our evidence for the grade awarded in the table below.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective multi-agency work to provide early intervention and support to families through a range of settings. ▪ The well-established and effective Local Safeguarding Children Board. ▪ Looked after children are placed in good quality placements and changes of placement are at very low levels.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The low and reducing number of referrals leading to initial assessments. ▪ Significant increases in both the number of children who have become subject to a child protection plan and the recorded number of children previously subject to a child protection plan. ▪ Some performance indicators regarding looked after children have deteriorated and are now equal to or below those of similar councils. For example, the timeliness of reviews.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. We are unable to agree with the council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area. We set out our evidence for the grade awarded in the table below.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is consistently strong, with many providers being good or better. ▪ There are no schools in an Ofsted category of concern. ▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. ▪ Very good performance resulting in the decrease of permanent exclusions to a rate significantly lower than the national rate.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite improvement in some areas, standards of attainment at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are low. ▪ Attendance in secondary schools is below average.

- Fixed term exclusions from primary and secondary level are far higher than the averages nationally and for similar councils.

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

- Good consultation arrangements with children and young people, including those from vulnerable groups. There is a strong commitment to involvement, with positive impact on planning and decision-making.
- Effective partnership work to reduce anti-social behaviour. The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system has decreased from the 2005 baseline.
- The proportion of looked after children that contribute to their reviews has improved well to become higher than the national average.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Rates of final warnings/reprimands or convictions of looked after children which have been persistently higher than similar councils for several years.

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

- Effective strategic leadership of the 14–19 partnership that has improved the range of provision.
- Improving 14–19 achievements overall, including good reduction of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training, above average success rates for work-based learners and other Level 1 provision and apprenticeships.
- Very effective support for looked after children and young people leaving care. All looked after children over the age of 15 have pathway plans and personal advisers. All are in suitable accommodation.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The low percentage of young people achieving a Level 2 qualification at age 19, which is below the national average.

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. Leadership and management of these services are good. The council provides good value for money and is taking effective action to address deep rooted and longstanding areas of underperformance. The council and its partners have high aspirations for children and young people which are reflected in a strong commitment to consultation and involvement. For example, the recent provision of trained advocates ensures that the views of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are taken into account as their support transfers to adult services. Priorities are clear and reflect well both local needs and the national agenda. There are good systems in place at all levels in services for children and families for the regular reporting and management of performance. Vacancy rates for front line social workers have increased and are now significantly above the national average. This reduces their capacity to provide a quality service to children and families.

Major strengths

- Good leadership and management: effective, informed and challenging political and senior leadership of the children and young people's partnership.
- A successful focus on vulnerable children and young people and tackling longstanding problems which has had notable impact, for example improvements in educational attainment at Key Stage 2 and reductions in the high rates of teenage conceptions.
- Effective identification of priorities ensures that targeted interventions lead to improvements.

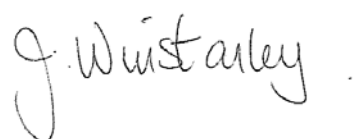
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Educational standards of attainment for 11- to 19-year-olds remain too low.

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