

17 December 2008

Mr Alan Wood
Director of Children Services
London Borough of Hackney
The Learning Trust
The Technology and Learning Centre
1 Reading Lane
London E8 1GQ

Dear Mr Wood

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in the London Borough of Hackney 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	2
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

The London Borough of Hackney makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. It delivers services which are consistently above minimum requirements and has made good progress in responding to the recommendations made in the 2007 APA.

Senior leadership is focused and ambitious for children and young people in the council. Improvements have been made in supporting young people to overcome the significant social and economic challenges they face. Outcomes in the area of health continue to improve; there has been a significant reduction in teenage conceptions and infant mortality rates have improved. Good progress has been made in ensuring children and young people are safe and strong action has been taken to reduce bullying and improve the care of looked after children. Improvements have been made to educational standards at all key stages. However, progress in reducing the number of primary schools in an Ofsted category has been slow. As a result of a strong strategic focus on improving youth services, participation of young people has increased and more are being trained to quality assure services, become involved in decision-making and promote improvement. The proportion of young people who are engaged in education, employment or training has increased but remains below average. In addition, improvements in the proportion of young people who attain Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications by the age of 19 have been slow.

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"> There has been a substantial drop in the infant mortality rate. A strong child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) partnership is in place ensuring prompt access to services for those who need it. The percentage decrease in the number of conceptions amongst 15- to 17-year-olds is better than that of similar councils and the national rate.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obesity rates amongst children are particularly high.

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.

Major strengths

- Effective bullying strategies are in place and a higher percentage of children feel safe in school than in the rest of the country.
- More looked after children live in good quality, stable family placements within 20 miles of the area than in comparable councils and a high number of children were adopted over the last year.
- Effective use of resources for children on the edge of care has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of looked after children.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has not ensured serious case reviews are held in line with government guidelines.

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

- Improvements have been made to educational standards at all key stages.
- The proportion of young people achieving five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics has improved rapidly and is now in line with the national average.
- Standards attained by looked after children are above the national average and their attendance is good. A headteacher has been appointed to oversee this area of work to improve outcomes further.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Despite improvements, standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are well below similar councils and the national average.
- The proportion of primary schools in a category of concern has not improved since the previous APA.
- Despite good recent improvements the level of exclusion for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is too high.

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The involvement of young people, including those with learning difficulties, in influencing decision-making and evaluating the services they use is good. ▪ There are a wide range of opportunities for looked after children and their carers to improve the services they use. This includes formal opportunities to discuss issues directly with senior council members. Participation of looked after children in their reviews has improved and is now good. ▪ More effective partnership working is helping to reduce crime and the national target for reducing re-offending has been exceeded. More young people who have offended are in education, employment or training than in similar councils.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The number of first-time entrants into the youth justice system is above similar councils.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong strategic direction and an effective 14–19 partnership is significantly improving the curriculum offer and participation rates in work-based learning for young people, including for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. ▪ Above average performance for looked after children has been further improved upon; outcomes in this area are good. ▪ The youth service, in partnership with schools, is helping to improve the proportion of young people who are engaged in education, employment or training.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although reducing, the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training is above similar councils and nearly twice the national average. ▪ The proportion of young people who achieve Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications by 19 is below similar councils and national averages. ▪ Although improving, attainment at Level 3 is below similar councils and well below the national average. ▪ A significantly higher proportion of young people with learning difficulties are not engaged in education, employment or training compared to similar councils and 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, as is its management of these services. Effective partnership working is resulting in improvements and promoting good outcomes for children and young people in most, but not all, areas of the council's work. There is a strong emphasis on continuous improvement through rigorous evaluation of practice, often by external consultants. This gives senior leaders a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses enabling them to prioritise actions appropriately.

Senior leaders have a clear vision and ambition for children and their families; however, the impact of actions, although good in many areas, is not consistent in all areas. For example, the impact of the council's support for primary schools in an Ofsted category of concern has yet to be fully realised and there has been insufficient progress in improving outcomes for 19 year olds.

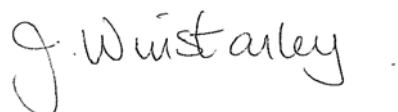
Strategic focus is maintained on children and young people through ensuring priorities in this area are incorporated into the priorities for the wider work of the council and in the local area agreement (LAA). The council, along with its partners, delivers its children's services well and has been very effective in diverting resources toward preventative services. For example, significant investment in providing support to families with children on the edge of care has reduced the number of looked after children. Innovative approaches to recruiting high calibre social care staff have more than halved the vacancy rates since 2006. Substantial progress has been made to improve the youth service which is impacting positively on participation rates of young people.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership in the council is effective and ambitious. The council have set a strong, clear vision for children and young people which is improving outcomes in most areas. Priorities for children are linked to the LAA and are part of the council's wider agenda, ensuring children and young people are a high priority at all levels. Increased emphasis on preventative services is improving outcomes for children and young people.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
Rates of improvement and performance management across key areas of the council's work are not consistent.

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 "J. Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection