

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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

Direct T 0161 618 8207
Direct F 0161 618 8514
North_apa@ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms Elaine McHale
Corporate Director of Children's Services
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
County Hall
Bond Street
Wakefield
WF1 2QW

Dear Ms McHale

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Wakefield Metropolitan District 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	2
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	4
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

Wakefield Metropolitan District Council consistently delivers services for children and young people above the minimum requirements. The council’s capacity to improve, including its service management, is good. Following the APA of 2007, the council has worked effectively to tackle all areas identified as weaknesses. Most notable are the improvements to enable children and young people to report and seek support following racist harassment and bullying. The high quality training materials produced by the council to raise awareness of community cohesion have been welcomed by schools. Secondary school children are achieving well and standards at GCSE continue to improve and are consistently higher than those of similar areas and those achieved nationally. Outcomes for younger learners, particularly in English at Key Stage 2, whilst improved on 2006 to 77% are not as high as found in similar council areas. The children and young person’s plan focuses clearly on strategies to reduce rates of teenage conception which have been, and continue to be very high. Services to support looked after children are very good. The most recent inspection of the council’s fostering service in December 2007 graded it as good overall. Significant improvements in the inspection ratings of the council’s children’s homes have also been achieved this year.

Being healthy

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The rate of health assessments and dental care for looked after children is very good at 89% completed within the year; this is a 5% improvement on 2006/7 and better than similar councils and England where achievement is 85%. ▪ Some 95% of Wakefield schools are participating in the national Healthy Schools initiative; of those, 76.6% have achieved the required standard against a regional target of 65% and a national target of 60% respectively. ▪ Progress has been made towards a comprehensive child and adolescent mental health service with the service now rated good.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The number of teenage conceptions amongst 15 to 17-year-olds stands at 53 per 10000. This is the highest figure for Wakefield since 2000. The council’s self assessment sets out a good range of interventions to tackle the high rate of teenage conceptions, but as yet these have not had a clear positive impact on outcomes. ▪ The prevalence of childhood obesity in Wakefield is 15% for reception year

children; this is the highest rate in the region and 2nd highest in England. The good progress of the Healthy Schools initiative and the good progress on improving levels of physical exercise in school children have not yet made a significant impact on reducing levels of obesity although recent data indicates early signs that obesity rates may now be falling.

- Some 4% of young people under 18 years were in substance misuse treatment in 2007 compared to a Yorkshire average of 8%. This indicates the council has been less successful than other local councils in getting young people into substance misuse treatment.

Staying safe

Grade 3

Current information indicates that the council has made progress in the area of staying safe. The staying safe grade is provisional pending the outcome of a serious case review currently being completed. Once this has been completed and assessed Ofsted will confirm the provisional grade or revise if necessary.

Major strengths

- The short term stability of placements for looked after children is very good with only 8% having three or more placements during the year. This represents a significant improvement on the last two year's figures of 12% and 11% respectively and is higher than similar councils and England for whom the rate is 11%. Long term stability of placements is also good with 70.2% of under 16's looked after continuously for two and a half years remaining in the same placement or placed for adoption for two years. This performance is better than similar councils and England as a whole.
- The council's fostering service was graded 'good' in December 2007. There have also been significant improvements in the inspection ratings of the council's children's homes.
- There has been a significant rise in the rate of children placed for adoption or special guardianship from 6.9% last year to 8.6%.
- The multi-agency Safe@Home service working on domestic violence issues in Wakefield has had considerable success with repeat incidences down from 55% to 37% in 12 months.
- The timeliness of initial assessments has increased significantly from 63.6% to 79.7%.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The timeliness of statutory reviews of looked after children has improved this year to 85% but is still below similar councils at 93% and England at 90%.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. Although the council has identified most of its strengths and areas for development and the overall trend is one of improvement there are still some areas of underperformance to remedy.

Major strengths

- The majority of maintained and private voluntary independent sector Early Years settings have been judged to be good or better by Ofsted. This performance is better than in similar council areas.
- Performance of schools in relation to Ofsted inspections is good. The number of schools in a category of concern is well below that of statistical neighbours and the national average.
- Exclusion rates for pupils have fallen to zero in primary schools with all agreeing to the code of practice in relation to fixed term exclusions. A key strength has been the impact of the social, emotional aspects of learning project in schools. When judged by Ofsted, behaviour in both primary and secondary has been rated good or better in over 80% of schools.
- Children and young people enjoy their education and many achieve well, particularly at Key Stage 4. The percentage of children achieving five or more GCSE A* to C including English and mathematics rose in 2007 to exceed the performance achieved in similar areas by nearly seven percentage points. The educational attainment of looked after children and young people is good and above that of similar councils.
- Performance of pupils in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 and in English at Key Stage 3 is above that found in similar areas and nationally.
- Attendance rates for children and young people are consistently good. In primary schools attendance rates increased in 2006/07 to 94.65% which is now higher than similar areas. Attendance rates in secondary schools also increased to 92.21% and are consistently above those of similar areas. Attendance rates for looked after children have improved with a condition on foster carers to report absences of children in their care to schools as well as social services.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Children's attainment in writing at the end of Key Stage 1 has followed the declining trend nationally but the rate of fall is sharper than elsewhere.
- In 2007 the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in English (77.3%) was well below similar areas and below that achieved nationally.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. 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"> ▪ The variety and scope of participation and consultation activities for children and young people is very good. It is well led and coordinated by an Inter-agency group called Involving Children and Young People. Voluntary and community groups play a strong role in this work. The council has been awarded Beacon status for Positive Youth Engagement in the community. ▪ The rate of participation of looked after children in their statutory reviews at 94% continues to be good and is better than the England average of 91%. ▪ The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system is reducing from a baseline of 875 in 2005/6 to 833 in 2006/7. Recent data provided by the council suggests a further substantial reduction to 666. ▪ The rate of re-offending by young people who are supervised by the Youth Offending Team has improved over the last two years from a base rate of 61% in 2005/6 to 54% in 2007/08.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of young people supervised by the youth offending team who are in employment, education or training is 63% compared to the 72% in similar council areas and a Youth Justice Board target of 90%.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There have been significant improvements in the number of young people achieving a Level 2 qualification by the age of 19. The percentage of those achieving a Level 3 qualification by the age of 19 has also risen. The rate of improvement for both levels is much better than in similar councils. ▪ The development of the 'Open Your Mind' training package and DVD for use in all schools designed to combat racist bullying and promote community cohesion. Racist incidences are now reported on line with a development to report bullying on line from all schools. ▪ Some 97.4 % of care leavers had a Pathway Plan, of which 82.5% were reviewed on time. This performance is very good when compared to similar areas and England as a whole.

- The percentage of young people where the council does not know whether they are in training or employment is low.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The recent decline in the proportion of young people not in employment, education and training aged 19 has stalled this year at 9.6%.

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 also good. Following recent staffing changes, permanent appointments have been made to strengthen the Children and Family Services Directorate. A highly efficient induction programme was instigated for the newly appointed service director for Safeguarding Family Support. Until a permanent appointment is made, the schools and lifelong learning directorate is managed by an experienced director from a neighbouring authority. Priorities are well based on thorough research and analysis with a keen eye for costs and budgetary restraints. High quality data on the performance of directorates as well as children and young people is scrutinised thoroughly and leads to appropriate strategic planning. Performance management systems are well embedded with targets and success criteria linked to improved outcomes for children and young people in Wakefield. When devising the children and young people's plan the council ensures it engages fully with young people and sets challenging but achievable outcomes. The vision for, 'Safe, Supported, Fulfilled', is deeply rooted in the aspirations of children and young people. Outcomes for children and young people are good with some significant areas of strength such as the proportion of young people attaining 5 A* to C at GCSE is consistently higher than those achieved both nationally and in similar areas. However, outcomes for pupils in Key Stage 2 in English are less strong. Issues identified in last year's APA have been tackled successfully.

Whilst the council clearly demonstrates a proven track record of improvement in many significant areas, there is still work to be done to tackle the high rates of childhood obesity and teenage conceptions. Strategic planning prioritises both of these weaknesses but improved provision has yet to make a significant impact on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Major strengths

- Standards and achievement of young people in their Key Stage 4 examinations exceed those found in similar areas and reflect a strong trend of improvement.
- The central place of the views of children and young people in planning council services for the future.
- The recent corporate assessment judged the council to be performing well.

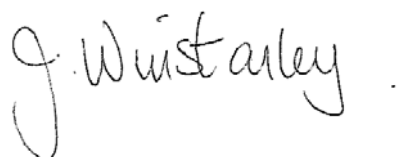
Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Some health outcomes such as teenage conceptions and levels of obesity are high and not reducing as rapidly as in similar areas. |
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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 blue ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection