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Ms Janet Tomlinson
Director for Children, Young People and Families
Oxfordshire County Council
Macclesfield House
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Dear Ms Tomlinson

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Oxfordshire County 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	2
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	4
Achieving economic well-being	1
Capacity to improve, including the management of services	2

*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

Oxfordshire County Council provides a service that meets only minimum requirements for users, although good performance has been maintained in two outcome areas. Strong senior leadership has driven significant reorganisation recently. There is vision and ambition across all services. This is underpinned by clear needs analysis, risk assessment and quality assurance. The council has accelerated the pace of improvement and has implemented the recommendations from the joint area review and the 2007 APA. Health outcomes are generally good and the council has continued its outstanding performance in engagement with children and young people. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has been strengthened and safeguarding outcomes are adequate, with more progress to be made on managing referrals and assessments. A recent refocusing on raising educational achievement has had some success and the council has developed a robust 14–19 strategy. Overall, however, children and young people of all ages in Oxfordshire are still not doing as well as those in comparable councils.

Children and young people's services have adequate capacity to improve further. The council is ambitious for children and young people in the area and has a clear focus on promoting inclusion and tackling disadvantage. Priorities are clear and knowledge about performance is increasingly used to drive improvements in outcomes. However, the trend of improvement in performance in key service areas is not yet secure.

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

- Services are targeted to areas of known inequality. A high proportion of schools have reached the Healthy School standard and this work is effectively linked to other initiatives which address the health needs of vulnerable groups.
- Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are comprehensive with good access for children and young people. Good preventative work by CAMHS had been successful in reducing the need for higher level interventions.
- There are good systems in place to support the health, emotional and social development of looked after children. Annual health assessments are comprehensive and the proportion of looked after children who have health assessments is higher than the national average.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The rate of conceptions amongst 15- to 17-year-olds has decreased significantly but overall progress is still below that of similar councils. ▪ The proportion of young people in substance misuse treatment remains lower than the regional average. |
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Staying safe

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 underestimates a number of important weaknesses and overvalues the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Robust action has been taken to increase the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and new policies and procedures are in place. Action taken in response to serious case reviews has been prompt and comprehensive and has raised the profile of safeguarding across agencies. ▪ Care placements are of good quality and good use is made of kinship care. Performance on the adoption of looked after children has improved strongly and is at higher levels than for similar councils. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recent changes to the way the council manages its referral and assessment processes have led to a doubling in the rate of referrals and a four-fold increase in re-referrals, although performance on re-referrals remains better than statistical neighbours. The reasons for these increases have yet to be fully understood. ▪ Although much improved to 85%, the proportion of reviews of care plans of looked after children completed within required time scales remains below that of similar councils and nationally. |
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Enjoying and achieving

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. This is in line with the council's self-assessment. 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"> ▪ Attendance at both primary and secondary schools has risen and is above average. ▪ Levels of permanent and fixed-term exclusions are below national averages and levels of permanent exclusions are below those of comparable councils. ▪ All statements of special educational need (excluding exceptions) are issued within 18 weeks, which places the council in the best quartile nationally on this indicator. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The proportion of students in special schools that are excluded for a fixed term is well below the proportion nationally and in comparable councils.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key Stage 1 results are well below those of statistical neighbours in reading, writing and mathematics. ▪ The percentage of students at Key Stage 4 who achieve five higher GCSE grades is below average. Progress at this key stage was below average in 2007. ▪ A higher than average proportion of students with statements in secondary schools is excluded for a fixed term.

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.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are outstanding mechanisms for consulting with children and young people including travellers, unaccompanied asylum seekers, looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Children and young people meet regularly with senior officers and elected members, their views are carefully considered and have a positive impact on decision-making. ▪ Highly effective programmes are reducing anti-social behaviour and diverting young people from criminal behaviour. ▪ The proportion of looked after children who participate in their reviews remains at a consistently high level.
Important weaknesses and areas for development

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 1

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. Despite improvements made to provision since the joint area review, the impact of these has not yet been sufficient to bring about the necessary improvement in several key areas. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportions of young people aged 16–18 whose current activity is not known or who are not in education, employment or training are lower than average. ▪ There is a good 14–19 strategy based on effective collaboration and an increasing diversity of courses and range and breadth of provision in colleges and work places. ▪ Outcomes for looked after children are improving with higher proportions going on to further education and high proportions in education, employment and training. The percentage of care leavers with pathway plans has increased and is above that of similar councils. Most care leavers have personal advisers.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Success rates for 19-year-olds at level 1 are around average, but are not improving as fast as they are nationally. ▪ The proportion of young people who achieve a level 2 qualification by 19 is below that of statistical neighbours. ▪ The percentage of young people achieving a level 3 qualification by 19 is below that of statistical neighbours. ▪ The proportion of young people completing Year 11 who continue in learning is below that found on average in similar council areas and nationally

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

Grade 2

The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is adequate and its management of these services is adequate. Children’s services are well led and partnership work is strong. Services are becoming increasingly integrated, and there has been significant investment in training staff as part of the development of the early intervention strategy and the common assessment framework. Performance management is improving as a result of more reliable data and better quality assurance. The recent joint area review found weaknesses in two service areas and robust action is being taken to secure improvement. The council has refocused on clear and appropriate priorities. Nevertheless, in a number of areas, much remains to be done in order to deliver consistently good outcomes for children and young people across the council.

Major strengths

- The council is clearly focused on improving outcomes for children and young people and robust action is being taken to tackle the areas for development identified in the joint area review and the 2007 APA. Recently-appointed key post-holders are providing strong leadership and challenge and progress is rigorously monitored.
- Prioritisation is soundly based on analysis of need, and priorities are set following extensive consultation with partner agencies and children and families.

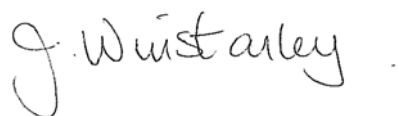
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Past low expectations for young people are hindering them from achieving good and outstanding outcomes.
- Delegated school funding does not fully reflect the council's priorities for areas of disadvantage.
- The culture of joint commissioning and shared working with regard to the 14–19 strategy is not embedded sufficiently to ensure that all young people have access to a good range of services.
- The trend of improvement in performance in key service areas is not yet secure.

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