

17 December 2008

Mr Anthony May
Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services
Nottinghamshire County Council
Children and Young People's Services Department
County Hall
West Bridgford
Nottingham
NG2 7QP

Dear Mr May

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Nottinghamshire 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	3
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	3
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 3

Nottinghamshire County Council consistently delivers services above the minimum requirements for users. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services is good. The council has responded effectively to the issues raised in the APA of 2007 with improvements evident in most areas. A particular strength is in the positive outcomes for children and young people who are most vulnerable. Looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities get a good service. They are exceptionally well involved in decisions that affect their lives. As a result the gap between their attainment and that of the general population is closing. Children and young people are well supported to stay safe. They are given good opportunities to make a positive contribution. Work with young people at risk of exclusion is improving their attendance, engagement and achievement. Good information advice and guidance supports young people as they make important choices about their futures. An above average number stay in employment, education or training when compared with national figures. The contributions made to being healthy and enjoying and achieving are adequate. Amongst the council's key priorities is a commitment to reducing health inequalities for children and young people, especially in deprived areas. Educational achievement is inconsistent across age ranges and geographical areas. An increasingly robust approach to working with schools is driving improvements, particularly at Key Stage 4. However, more needs to be done to increase the number of schools that are judged to be good or better. All partners have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development, which is evident in the self-assessment and in the CYPP. The new targets in the revised CYPP show that the council is well placed to take this work forward. The recent joint area review (JAR) judged service management and capacity to improve to be good.

Being healthy

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

- Extensive development of children's centres in the county gives parents, carers and their children good levels of support through a wide range of initiatives and projects.
- Access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) for most priority groups, including looked after children and those in the youth offending service, is good and action planning is robust. Waiting times are reducing.
- Rates for teenage conception compare well with similar areas and the national picture. The teenage pregnancy strategy has been refocused in the hotspot areas with the development of targeted ways of reaching young people, including young men, within their own communities.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Health outcomes for children and young people in areas of significant deprivation are weak.
- The number of looked after children and young people that receive regular health screening has reduced significantly.
- There is too much variation in the arrangements for transition of health services as young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities move to adulthood.

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

- Sustained good performance across the range of safeguarding performance indicators.
- Looked after children and young people in Nottinghamshire receive a good service and placement stability is very good.
- Private fostering arrangements are good.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Policies are not yet sufficiently effective to reduce bullying in schools.
- Arrangements across the county for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to move from early years to the primary phase are weak.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- The outcomes for vulnerable groups, including looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at all key stages are good.
- Achievement in the early years and foundation stage is good.
- There is strong partnership working with parents and across the service.
- There are good levels of reintegration and achievement for children and young people educated other than at school.

- Achievement at Key Stage 4 has improved significantly faster than statistical neighbours and the national average.
- A focus on persistent absence through a multi-agency approach has led to improvements in attendance in secondary schools and rates of exclusion for looked after children are exceptionally low.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- There is too much variation in the standards of achievement and rates of progress of children and young people across the county.
- At Key Stage 1, literacy, especially among boys, and progress in English are below the national average at Key Stage 2.
- At Key Stage 3 results are below the national average and too many schools do not meet government targets for GCSE results.
- The proportion of schools being placed in a category of concern remains above the national average and significantly fewer schools have been graded good or better in their most recent inspections.
- Exclusions in secondary schools are above the national average.

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

- There are good opportunities for all groups of children and young people to participate in decision making and to make a positive contribution.
- The levels and quality of participation by looked after children in their reviews is outstanding.
- Rates of re-offending are lower than average and reducing.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The number of first time entrants to the youth justice system is above statistical neighbours.

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a good 14–19 partnership, which has accelerated progress for this phase. ▪ Outcomes at Level 2 are good. ▪ Young people are supported well with good advice and guidance which is readily accessible. ▪ Effective academic and vocational courses ensure that an above average number of young people stay in education or employment with training, including those with vulnerable groups.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are too many young people aged 19 or over whose destination is unknown after leaving school. ▪ A-level performance in school sixth forms is not as good as statistical neighbours.

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. Under the decisive leadership of the recently appointed Director of Children and Young People's Services, issues from the APA in 2007 are being tackled systemically with particular success in the area of staying safe. Thorough needs analysis for each of the Every Child Matters outcomes informs strategic planning. However, there is an under-developed emphasis on outcomes. The council is increasingly challenging schools to raise standards and is providing good support for those where performance is inadequate. However, work on the New Relationship with Schools is in the early stages of development. All partners have helped to accurately identify areas of need in other aspects of the council's work and targeted intervention has been put in place. Middle leaders have been given greater opportunities to participate in strategic decision making as members of the extended leadership team. Value for money is being effectively secured through a joint approach to commissioning. A medium term financial strategy has been developed to enable the council to take a longer term view of budget setting.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accurate and robust self-assessment that takes account of the views of a wide range of stakeholders. ▪ Good outcomes have already been achieved against a range of challenging targets, especially those related to staying safe. ▪ Equality and diversity issues have been effectively addressed with a strong commitment to reducing the gap in outcomes in the most deprived areas of the community.

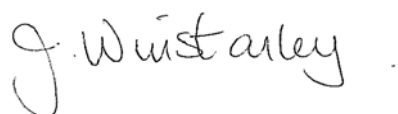
Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The rate of progress in improving education and health outcomes is inconsistent across the services and districts.▪ The use of school data to anticipate patterns and trends in performance is not yet sufficiently developed to ensure rapid preventative action when necessary. |
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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