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17 December 2008

Mr Ian Craig and Mr Keith Abbott
Acting Directors – Children, Families and Education Directorate
Kent County Council
Sessions House
County Hall
Maidstone
Kent
ME14 1XQ

Dear Mr Craig and Mr Abbott

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

*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

Kent County Council provides a service that consistently delivers above the minimum requirement for children and young people with innovative practice in a number of areas. It makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. Services are well targeted at vulnerable groups and there is a strong track record of improvement. The outcomes for most children and young people are good and there is a narrowing of the gap with most vulnerable groups. Child protection arrangements are good and effective. Good support is provided for looked after children, including the disproportionately high number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children in Kent. Good progress has been made in improving the quality of schools and as a result the proportion of schools requiring special measures has fallen and is below that of similar councils and the national average. An innovative approach to developing vocational pathways has resulted in a significant increase in the number of young people participating in, and successfully completing, apprenticeships. However, in some areas there is room for further improvement, for example, youth re-offending rates.

Good progress has been made in the implementation of the action plan to address the recommendations of the JAR this year. The impact is already apparent in a number of areas, for example, recent improvement in services for children with disabilities and for looked after children, although in others it is too early to show impact, for example, through improved monitoring of teenage pregnancy across Kent.

The sustained and consistent improvement in outcomes for children and young people demonstrates that Kent County Council has shown excellent capacity to improve. High quality services have been maintained and the council has applied innovative solutions to solve problems.

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"> ▪ Over 99% of schools are participating in the Healthy Schools Programme and the proportion achieving the award is good. ▪ Sexual health provision is appropriately targeted at vulnerable groups. ▪ There is increased investment in child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to improve access for vulnerable groups, including children with learning difficulties.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of looked after children receiving timely annual health and dental checks, although improved, is lower than for similar councils. |
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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

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong leadership and contribution to the work of Kent's Safeguarding Children Board. ▪ Timeliness of initial and core assessments of children and their families, which are above similar councils. ▪ Stability of placements for looked after children are better than in similar councils, including the number of children adopted. |
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Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-agency use of the common assessment framework and monitoring arrangements are not fully embedded in localities. |
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Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. 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

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of young people gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C, at 66%, is above the national average and similar councils. The contextual value added figure for Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 is significantly above the national average. ▪ The number of schools in special measures has continued to reduce and consequently the proportion of schools in special measures is below that of similar councils and the national average. There has also been improvement in the number of schools inspected judged to be good or better so that relative performance has moved up from the lowest quarter to the second quarter nationally. ▪ The improved proportion of children and young people leaving care with five or |
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more good grades at GCSE is 16%. This figure is much higher than in similar councils and nationally, which are 9% and 11% respectively.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Low overall standards in reading and writing in primary schools compared to similar councils and nationally.
- Standards at Key Stage 3 are rising more slowly than in similar councils and nationally.

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

- Children and young people make a positive contribution to both strategic planning and service development, and effective strategies are in place to enable them to do so, including the participation of looked after children in their reviews.
- Good action is taken to identify and reduce anti-social behaviour.
- There is a good range of services for those who are at risk of offending and those who have offended.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Proportion of children and young people who do not feel consulted in decision making in schools.

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 gives too much weight to the significance of some of the improvements that have been made. Economic well-being outcomes are generally better than in similar councils but, although improving, are not consistently considerably better. For example, the proportion of young people achieving a Level 3 qualification and GCE/VCE average points scores are not significantly better than those of similar councils but have the same trend of improvement.

Major strengths

- The numbers of children and young people in education, employment or training.

- The proportion of young people achieving a Level 2 qualification by age 19.
- The good 14–19 strategy that is based on effective collaboration, which has led to improvement in participation rates and outcomes for young people. Figures for apprenticeships are higher than those in similar councils and nationally.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Lower proportion than similar councils of children aged 14 or over with disabilities who have a transition plan in place.
- Accommodation and resources in alternative education centres.

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

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is excellent. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is outstanding and its management of these services is excellent. Leadership is very strong and work with partners very effective in delivering the very ambitious and challenging priorities agreed to improve outcomes for children and young people in Kent. Financial management is secure and integrated with strategic and service planning and there is a clear and sustained focus on achieving value for money. Joint commissioning arrangements are well established and increasingly cost effective. The council actively seeks and responds to the views of children and young people and partners, for example, in the review of the Children and Young People Plan 2008–2011.

Major strengths

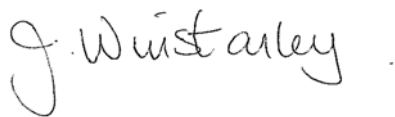
- Outstanding leadership and direction.
- Strong and consistent record of improvement and partnership working.
- Well targeted services to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.
- Good performance management.
- The focus on value for money is embedded across all services.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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 "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection