

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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

Direct T 0117 945 6293
Direct F 0117 945 6554
South_ap@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Judith Pettersen
Director of Children's Services and Lifelong Learning
London Borough of Hounslow
The Civic Centre
Lampton Road
Hounslow
TW3 4DN

Dear Mrs Pettersen

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in the London Borough of Hounslow 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	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 Hounslow continues to make a good contribution to improving the lives of children and young people in the area. It consistently delivers services that are above minimum requirements and all outcomes are judged to be good. The strong performance noted in the last APA and in the 2006 joint area review has been maintained and the council has made good progress in addressing the majority of areas for development identified in these reports. A full review of the council’s structures and systems has been undertaken over the past year to further improve its effectiveness. Access to health services is well coordinated and this ensures good outcomes for most children and young people. Firm action has been taken to strengthen the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). Children and young people in the borough continue to report that they enjoy school very much and increasing proportions choose to stay in education after the age of 16. Improved collaboration between partners has provided a wider range of educational and work related opportunities for young people, making a good contribution to their economic well-being. There are good opportunities for children and young people to be consulted and to express their views. However, their direct involvement and the difference that they make to the improvement of services are yet to be fully realised.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of annual health checks undertaken for looked after children at 90% is consistently high, exceeding the rates for other similar councils, 88% and for England as a whole, 85%. ▪ Teenage conception rates have decreased by 11.6% since 1998 and the borough is no longer under ministerial scrutiny. Teenage conception rates have fallen faster over the last two reported years than other similar councils and in England as a whole. ▪ The council has been more successful than other London councils in getting young people suffering from substance misuse into treatment. In Hounslow 14% access treatment, as opposed to the London average of 9%.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rates of obesity amongst children and young people are too high and while the council has identified this as a key priority for 2008–09, plans lack a firm strategic, co-ordinated or targeted approach to improve rates. ▪ Chlamydia screening rates are well below target and there is no clear strategy in place to improve this position.

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

- The LSCB is now well established from a previously weak base and is in a good position to take forward the safeguarding of children and young people.
- There is a continuing upward trend in the proportion of initial assessments of children in need completed on time, from a very low base in 2003 and the proportion is now above similar councils.
- Safeguarding in early years settings has improved. The council's audit of group childcare provision shows there has been an increase of 10% in settings graded good or better for the 'staying safe' judgement. All settings have an action plan to address any weaknesses.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- There are insufficient numbers of foster carers and rates for referrals of private fostering continue to be low. Of those looked after children, 5.8% are fostered by relatives or friends, compared with 11.1% for other similar councils and 12.4% for England as a whole.
- At 24%, a significant minority of children and young people still report that they feel unsafe in the borough and have a higher than average fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. The council's own resident's panel survey indicates that 23% of parents and carers felt that their children were unsafe in town centres after dark, and measures put in place to tackle safety issues have not improved the fear of crime and anti social behaviour of children and young people living in the borough.

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

- There has been continued improvement in levels of attainment at all key stages, especially at GCSE where the indicators are now above national averages and improving faster than those for the statistical neighbours and the national picture.
- There is good support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensuring that they make good progress in relation to their starting points.
- Attendance in secondary schools continues to improve and is consistently above

that of statistical neighbours and England as a whole. The attendance for looked after children and young people has improved each year since 2004.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Too many excluded children and young people do not have access to their full entitlement of 25 hours teaching per week, including those who have offended. This is well below that of the statistical neighbours and England as a whole.

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 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.

Major strengths

- The youth offending service has strengthened their strategic working. This has made a difference to the proportion of first time offenders, which has decreased by 31% this year. This continues to be below that of the statistical neighbours.
- The Youth Crime Prevention Strategy is efficient, demonstrating effective planning and partnership working, having increased its quality score by the Youth Justice Board from 63% in January 2007 to 96% in November 2007. This work has included a targeted focus on gang-related and youth-on-youth violence.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Structures for seeking the views of children and young people are not yet sufficiently embedded or formalised to ensure that they are fully involved in the work of the council and able to make a difference to local services. This issue was also raised in last year's APA.
- Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not have sufficient opportunities to develop local services. A new participation strategy is being developed but this has not yet had an impact on their ability to influence local services. This issue was also raised in last year's APA.

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"> ▪ Partnership working between schools, employers and voluntary providers ensures an increasing range of curriculum opportunities. ▪ The proportion of those leaving care who are engaged in employment, education or training continues to be very good in comparison to statistical neighbours and the national picture. ▪ There has been further improvement in providing suitable accommodation for care leavers, with 94% living in suitable housing. This exceeds figures for statistical neighbours and national averages for the sixth year in a row.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although showing improvement, at 63% and below national averages, not enough young people involved with the youth offending service are engaged in education, employment or training. ▪ Although many achieve well in school, the proportion of young people over the age of 16 with a learning difficulty and/or disability engaged in education, employment or training is currently 60%, which is below that of the statistical neighbours.

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

Grade 3

The capacity of the council to improve its services for children and young people is good and its management of these services is also good. This has been a particularly busy year for the council, with a major revision of its management structures, systems and responsibilities. With a clear focus on what needs to be done to improve from an already strong position, senior leaders have successfully steered the council towards new ways of working. Despite the considerable changes that have been made, they have kept their eye on the ball, ensuring continued improvement across a range of local services. Most of the areas identified for improvement at the last APA have been tackled effectively. Some good progress has been made in addressing areas identified at that time such as a continued decline in the proportion of children and young people excluded from school. A notable success over the past year has been an increase in the proportion of young people involved in education employment and training. The council has put in place strong measures to manage performance including frequent reviews to assess progress through targets in the Children and Young People’s Plan. They continue to use their resources well. There is a clear commitment to improving local services for children and young people, and this is strengthened by a strong working relationship between senior officers and elected members.

Major strengths

- A major overhaul of the structures and processes across the borough has been successfully undertaken over the past year. This was done in order to address an identified need to integrate services further. As a result, four new departments have been established, each led by an Assistant Director.
- There is a high commitment to ensuring that all relevant partners work collaboratively, through rigorous assessments of services. This ensures that plans are firmly founded on clear analysis of what needs to be done and a shared understanding of how targets will be reached and accounted for.
- There has been continued improvement in narrowing the attainment gap for particular groups of children and young people, including those from Black and minority ethnic heritages.

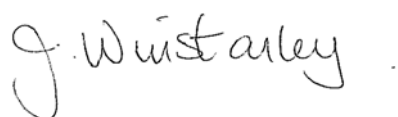
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Some actions taken have not yet had sufficient time to impact on improved outcomes for the children and young people, including issues around smoking and making full use of their views.

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