

17 December 2008

Mr Dave Hill
Executive Director
Department for Children, Young People and Learners
London Borough of Croydon
2nd Floor, Taberner House
Park Lane
Croydon
CR9 1TP

Dear Mr Hill

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in the London Borough of Croydon 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.¹

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.

¹ Data yet to be confirmed

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	3
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	2
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	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

The London Borough of Croydon delivers services for children and young people that meet minimum requirements for users although good performance has been achieved in three outcome areas. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services is adequate. The council has experienced a period of major change with most senior leaders having taken up their positions during the past year. The situation has stabilised now and leadership has been strengthened but this was preceded by a period of uncertainty with vacancies and interim appointments to key posts. Good progress is now beginning to be made to address the recommendations of the 2007 APA and the 2008 JAR. Outcomes for health, safeguarding and economic well-being remain good. The good support provided for looked after young people and care leavers results in this group achieving well when compared against similar groups nationally and in similar councils. There has been some improvement in the academic attainment of children and young people, particularly in the older age groups however this overall improvement masks a huge variation between the highest and lowest performing schools and between different groups of pupils. The council's contribution to ensuring that children and young people make an effective positive contribution is adequate and improving. The council is beginning to tackle the need to improve the effectiveness of consultation with, and participation of, children and young people in decisions that affect them.

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"> ▪ Good access to and provision of child and adolescent mental health services, including early intervention and prevention. ▪ Effective engagement of schools and partner agencies to promote healthy lifestyles in young people, with high levels of schools participating in the Healthy Schools Programme. ▪ Effective multi-agency support for young people with drug or substance abuse, including good preventative work in schools and colleges.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Levels of teenage pregnancy remain high despite a wide range of provision and high prioritisation by the council and its partners.

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective range of prevention and early intervention services, in particular parenting and family support and work with children at risk of domestic violence and those at risk of going missing. ▪ Strong partnership working led by an effective and committed Local Safeguarding Children Board. ▪ Good support for looked after children and care leavers, in particular the support for high levels of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recent decline in some key performance indicators for example children placed for adoption and levels of core assessments being undertaken. ▪ High levels of children and young people who are made subject of child protection plans more than once.

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 for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A steady improvement in Foundation Stage Profile scores which are now in line with levels in comparative councils and those nationally. Good assessment and moderation systems relating to the Foundation Stage Profile. ▪ The proportion of children attaining five A* to C grades including five good GCSEs including English and mathematics improved in 2007 and is now in line with comparative councils. ▪ Attainment and attendance of looked after children are better than that found in statistical neighbours and nationally.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of schools judged to be good or outstanding in inspections is lower than the national average and there is a consistently higher than average number of schools in Ofsted categories of concern. ▪ Attendance in secondary schools continues to be below the national average

and the average for similar councils.

- Higher than average rates of exclusions from primary, secondary and special schools particularly for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, boys and some ethnic minority groups.

Making a positive contribution

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 for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

- Effective use of Youth Opportunities Funding/Youth Community Fund to enable young people influence decision making and identifying and engaging disadvantaged young people and young people in disadvantaged areas.
- Good support to looked after children resulting in low numbers involved in the youth justice process and high levels participating in their reviews.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- High levels of young people involved in the youth justice system as first time entrants and as repeat offenders.
- Slow progress in the implementation of systematic consultation processes to engage young people and enable them to contribute to service evaluation and development at strategic levels.

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

- Increase in outcomes at Levels 2 and 3 which are above the levels in similar councils and nationally.
- A significant increase in the percentage of 17-year-olds participating in education, employment and work based learning to levels which are above those seen nationally and in comparable councils.
- The percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training is higher than London averages and very good compared with national averages.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relatively low numbers in work based learning and relatively low performance of advanced apprentices. ▪ Low participation of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in education, employment and training. |
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Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 2

The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services is adequate. The council has undergone a period of rapid change and uncertainty with almost all of its senior managers relatively new in post. Changes in personnel, interim appointments and vacancies in some key roles have hindered the council's capacity to improve its services. This is particularly evident in the area of school improvement. Partnerships with schools are not as strong as those with other partners and this continues to impede progress. However, ambition is high, partnership working is generally good and there is a strong commitment at all levels to improve outcomes for children and young people in Croydon. Financial management is good and value for money satisfactory. The council has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Priorities are clear and well founded. Systems for performance management and the monitoring of progress towards targets are improving although there is still some way to go to embed the shared use of data, effective joint commissioning and the alignment of action planning. Progress on issues raised in 2007 APA and the more recent 2008 JAR has been mixed with some rapid progress seen in some areas such as the provision of statutory entitlement to education for excluded pupils and improvement in the Adoption services. Other aspects such as attendance, exclusions and variability in school provision have continued to cause concern and there has been deterioration in some important indicators such as the timely completion of core assessments.

Major strengths

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A strengthened leadership team demonstrating a high level of corporate ambition. ▪ Established and effective use of the voluntary sector to enhance capacity and build good partnerships. ▪ Rapid remedial response to inspection findings, for example in the adoption service, resulting in improvements within a relatively short time. |
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Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ineffective support and challenge provided to ensure school improvement. This is compounded by weaknesses in the partnerships with schools. ▪ Performance management and monitoring systems are not yet embedded to |
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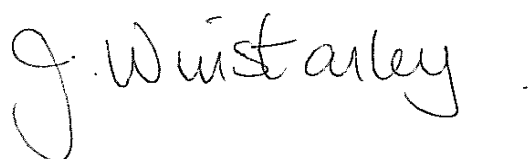
ensure consistent early identification and timely intervention.

- Recent improvements in aligning planning and commissioning are at an early stage of 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 "J. Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection