

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_APA@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr John Christie
Director of Children and Families
London Borough of Brent
Chesterfield House
9 Park Lane
Wembley
Middlesex
HA9 7RW

Dear Mr Christie

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in the London Borough of Brent 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	2
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 Brent delivers good services that deliver above minimum requirements. Clear, determined leadership and close partnership working has enabled the council to sustain good performance in most outcomes areas. The capacity to improve, including the management of children’s services, is good. Performance in provision for social care has fallen in some important aspects and is judged adequate. Improvements in commissioning arrangements are strengthening services for looked after children and young people and have, for example, resulted in reducing the use of residential placements. However, capacity issues including staff absences have contributed to a decline in performance in a number of performance indicators.

The council has made good progress in responding to the recommendations made in the 2007 APA and joint area review report, published in April 2006. Children and young people continue to achieve well in schools, making good progress to reach academic standards that are consistently above national averages at the ages of 16 and 18. There have been further improvements since the 2007 APA in raising the attainment of minority ethnic groups and looked after children. The narrowing of the attainment gap remains a key priority for Brent. Young people in Brent have high aspirations and the council continues to do well at increasing the numbers in education, employment or training. Nonetheless, recidivism rates are not falling quickly enough. There has been good progress in reducing the rates of exclusions in secondary schools to bring the figures into line with the national average and good progress in reducing the rates of teenage pregnancy.

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 reduction in teenage pregnancy rates which are falling faster than similar councils. ▪ Comprehensive and accessible child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), including good access to specialist services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health assessments and dental checks for looked after children have fallen below similar councils.

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 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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good adoption rates and high numbers of children and young people in kinship placements. ▪ Effective and well-targeted preventative and intervention services contributing to a reduction in the number of children looked after. ▪ Young people are well supported in school and report feeling safe from bullying.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of looked after children having had three or more placement moves in one year has risen above similar councils and national averages. ▪ The number of core assessments completed within timescale has risen slightly but remains below similar councils and the national average. ▪ In the following key areas of social care provision the council's performance has fallen and is below that of similar councils and the national average: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reviews of children subject to a child protection plan - the number of looked after children adopted within 12 months of the decision of best interest.

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.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children and young people make good progress and attainment is above average by age 16; standards continue to rise. ▪ Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well in comparison with their peers nationally. ▪ The school improvement service gives good support and challenge for schools causing concern.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standards at the end of the Foundation Stage and at Key Stage 1 remain below similar councils and national figures. ▪ Despite a rising trend in results, the attainment of Black Caribbean, Black African and looked after children remains below that of other groups of children and young people in Brent. |
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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.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is good intervention with those at risk of offending. There is a reduction in the numbers of first-time offenders. ▪ The council takes effective measures to engage young people who offend in education, employment or training. ▪ Opportunities for children and young people to give their views on services are effective and include harder-to-reach young people. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Re-offending rates are above similar councils. |
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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>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of young people gaining Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications at age 19 is consistently above similar councils and the national figures. ▪ Participation levels of those over 16 who are in education, employment or training are higher than local and national figures, including for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those leaving care. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The breadth of work-based learning opportunities remains too narrow and the availability of apprenticeships is limited. |
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Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 3

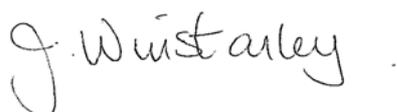
The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good and its management of these services is good. Effective partnership working across agencies has contributed to improved performance in some of the areas identified within the 2007 APA. The council has made good progress in strengthening specialist services; there has been significant development in integrated services delivery for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Prioritisation is good, and is based on identified need. Local area agreement targets have a clear focus on children and young people, and are aligned appropriately with the priorities identified in the council's children and young people's plan. However, stretched capacity on some areas of Children's Social Care Services, in particular the Referral and Assessment Service, has had a negative impact on the consistent improvement of performance.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership and management of services are strong and successful. ▪ Priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people are clear, with well founded plans for reorganising the service. ▪ Clear focus on providing value for money across the services.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The number of vacant posts for social workers is high. ▪ Inconsistent performance in social care.

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