

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



17 December 2008

Mrs Lesley Heale  
Director of Social Care and Learning  
Bracknell Forest Council  
Seymour House  
38 Broadway  
Bracknell  
Berkshire  
RG12 1AU

Dear Mrs Heale

## **Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Bracknell Forest Borough 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.

<b>Assessment judgement area</b>	<b>APA grade</b>
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	4
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

Bracknell Forest consistently delivers services for children and young people that are above the minimum requirements. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is good. The council has further strengthened effective partnerships that have had a significant impact on the outcomes for children and young people's health, social care and achievements in secondary schools. There has been a good response to the recommendations of the 2007 APA and joint area review, particularly in terms of safeguarding children and young people and engaging more of them in identifying their health needs. The council has made impressive progress in reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training. Fixed-term exclusions, however, remain high in the secondary sector but not for looked after children. The council has undertaken good work in strengthening the partnerships between schools and colleges and in improving the choices available to its youngsters. The council has rightly set itself ambitious targets for the further development of employer involvement in 14–19 partnerships. Standards have improved in terms of boys' writing and attainment in Key Stage 3. However, the above average overall attainment at Key Stage 2, noted last year, is proving harder to sustain, particularly in mathematics. The council has a clear understanding of what the key areas for development are and, in most cases, has based its prioritisation on a thorough and rigorous analysis of need. It has been successful in retaining and attracting the expertise it needs to push forward its ambitious plans.

## 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 is accurate but insufficient weight has been given to the lack of progress since the last APA in reducing the excessive waiting times for assessment before occupational and physiotherapies.

### Major strengths

- Highly effective multi-agency working is promoting healthy lifestyles and delivering some outstanding outcomes for children and young people, particularly in terms of reducing teenage conceptions; increasing the proportion of schools achieving the National Healthy School standard; and increasing the proportion of children and young people participating in two hours of sport and physical education every week.
- Children and young people have good access to a wide range of effective child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).
- There are very good levels of health care for looked after children and young people.

<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
--

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The assessment waiting times for physiotherapy and occupational therapy services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are too long.</li> </ul> |
|--|

**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 in this outcome area underestimate two important weaknesses in aspects of family placements for looked after children.

<p><b>Major strengths</b></p>
-------------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There has been a good response to achieving a consistent understanding of the threshold for accessing safeguarding services amongst partners. This has resulted in an increased level of appropriate referrals.</li> <li>▪ There is good performance in completing initial assessments, and very good performance in completing core assessments within timescales. In both cases, the council exceeds the average performance nationally.</li> <li>▪ There are good safeguarding standards in the one children's home managed by the council and in the adoption and fostering services.</li> <li>▪ All looked after children, or those with a child protection plan, are allocated to a qualified social worker. All reviews of child protection plans and 96% of statutory looked after children's reviews were completed on time. This exceeded the average performance of similar councils.</li> <li>▪ There are good opportunities for young people to raise concerns, make representations and complaints and express their views through the use of advocates and independent visitors.</li> <li>▪ There are good services that safeguard children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.</li> <li>▪ The transition arrangements between children and adult services for vulnerable groups are good.</li> </ul> |
|--|

<p><b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b></p>
--

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The use of placements with family and friends is too low.</li> <li>▪ Too few children have been placed for adoption over a three year period and no Special Guardianship Orders have been made.</li> </ul> |
|---|

## 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

- At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are exceeding threshold targets in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy.
- Children in Key Stage 1 do well in mathematics compared to the averages nationally and for similar councils.
- There is a strong trend of improvement at Key Stage 3, particularly in mathematics, science and boys attainment in English.
- Overall attainment of looked after children is better than the national average for this group of young people.
- The attendance of looked after children is better than the averages nationally and for similar councils.
- Most children and young people, across all phases, enjoy school.

### Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Some groups of children and young people from minority ethnic communities do not achieve well enough.
- Attainment in mathematics at Key Stage 2 is below that of statistical neighbours. The year-on-year trend is also below the national average and the average for similar councils.
- In the secondary phase, fixed-term exclusions are higher than those for similar councils, whilst permanent exclusions are above the averages nationally and for similar councils.

## Making a positive contribution

## Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. 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, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are looked after, are closely involved in strategic decision making.
- There has been a significant increase to 90% in the proportion of looked after children who participate in their reviews and subsequent care planning.

- There has been a significant reduction in the number of young people who offend for the first-time or who re-offend. Performance is now better than the average for similar councils.
- Children and young people have been actively engaged in the recruitment of key staff and managers.

**Important weaknesses and areas for development**

**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**

- There has been a significant and sustained reduction in the proportion of all young people aged 16–18 not in education, employment or training.
- There is good assessment of learning needs of young people aged 14–19, and young people receive good advice and support on education, employment and training.
- All care leavers are allocated a personal adviser and are provided with good emotional, practical and financial support.

**Important weaknesses and areas for development**

- There is an insufficient range of education and training provision accessible locally for those over the age of 16.

**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, as is its management of those services. There has been an incremental improvement in all areas identified as needing attention by the last APA and the joint area review. The changes in the senior management team have not deflected services from the course set out in the soundly based children and young people's plan. There are good plans in place. Most of these are multi-agency in nature with ambitious and stretching targets, based on a thorough analysis of needs. However, in some areas there insufficient use is made of available data.

Capacity to deliver services is generally good and usually very cost-effective, despite the pressures providing appropriate placements for a few children with highly complex needs. Workforce planning has been very effective, enabling the council and its partners to respond to changing service demands. Children's services are a key priority for the council and its partners. The partnership ensures that vulnerable

children and young people have opportunities to succeed and there is a clear determination to enable all young people to voice their opinions and play their part in the development of services.

<b>Major strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The leadership of children's services is strong and partnership working is very effective.</li><li>▪ A coherent 14–19 partnership has been developed that is taking decisive action to extend provision for young people.</li><li>▪ The council has set and achieved stretching targets in order to secure improvements in services and outcomes, for example in relation to childhood obesity and young people not in education, employment or training.</li><li>▪ There is good support for schools causing concern.</li></ul>
<b>Important weaknesses and areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The educational progress and achievements of ethnic minority communities are not rigorously monitored.</li></ul>

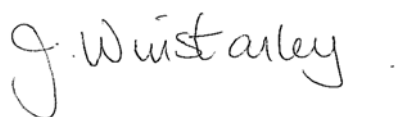





The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

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