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Mrs Margaret Asquith
Director of Children's Services
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
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Paderborn House
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Bolton
Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Asquith

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Bolton Metropolitan 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.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	4
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

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council consistently delivers above minimum requirements for children and young people. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is outstanding. The council has responded positively to the recommendations raised in the joint area review (JAR) in 2007 and has made strong progress since that time particularly with respect to: reducing the rate of teenage conceptions; developing the use of common performance data; improving attainment at Key Stage 4; reducing the absence from school of looked after children; and in promoting more effective strategies to tackle the high percentage of young people not engaged in education, employment or training.

The contribution the council makes towards helping children and young people to be healthy remains good. There has been good progress over the past year in reducing the rate of teenage conceptions, noted as a weakness in both the APA and JAR, and in the waiting times for children and young people accessing mental health services. The contribution the council makes towards safeguarding children and young people appears to be very good. The common assessment framework has been fully integrated into the work of all local staff, and family support and preventative services are effective and demonstrate excellent value for money.

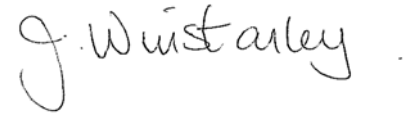
Over the last year attendance in schools has improved to above the national average and there has been a sustained improvement in attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4. Support for the small number of schools causing concern is well targeted and effective. Well structured recruitment and support for newly appointed headteachers has strengthened the improvement agenda and is beginning to impact strongly on outcomes. Regular feedback from children and young people is being used very well to drive forward improvements in service.

A strong commitment to the children and young people's plan and its priorities is evident across the council. Self-assessment is realistic, well focused and a major driver in a strong improvement culture. Effective working partnerships are focused on meeting the needs of the local communities.

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 as part of this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues in preparing for the assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager
Local Services Inspection

Major strengths and important weaknesses

Major strengths	Important weaknesses and areas for development
<p>Being healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comprehensive access to health care for looked after children. ▪ Decrease in the number of teenage conceptions. ▪ Good improvements in waiting times for child and adolescent health services, with particularly good access for vulnerable groups. 	<p>Being healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing infant mortality rates, which are now significantly higher than the national average. ▪ Increasing numbers of young people admitted to hospital due to narcotic and psychodysleptics poisoning.
<p>Staying safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good reduction in numbers of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents. ▪ Strong and inclusive family support services, representing excellent value for money. ▪ Effective implementation of the common assessment framework, with a clear understanding of thresholds across agencies. 	<p>Staying safe</p>
<p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sharp focus on underperformance of schools. ▪ Improved attainment at Key Stage 3 and 4 is rapidly bridging the gap with the national average. ▪ Good and improving attendance in both primary and secondary schools. ▪ High quality provision in special schools and pupil referral units. 	<p>Enjoying and achieving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of pupils whose GCSEs include A* to C in English and mathematics, which is currently below the national average. ▪ Achievement of looked after children at Key Stage 4.
<p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well developed mechanisms and opportunities for children and young people to contribute to local decision making affecting their lives. ▪ Decreasing numbers of young people committing a first offence and a repeat offence. 	<p>Making a positive contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numbers of looked after children receiving final warnings or being convicted is rising.

<p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comprehensive and coherent 14–19 strategy based on excellent working partnerships. ▪ Sustained improvement in the percentage of young people achieving Level 2 and 3 by age 19. ▪ Wide range of practical and applied options available within broad 14–19 curriculum including an extensive diploma programme. ▪ Consistent improvement in apprenticeship frameworks and NVQ success rates for work-based learners to above national averages. 	<p>Achieving economic well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of young people not engaged in education, employment or training is improving but is still below the proportion found in other similar areas.
<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong leadership and well-focused strategic management enhanced by a self-critical and enabling self-assessment. ▪ Strong work force development. ▪ Discernable improvement trends in key indicators. 	<p>Capacity to improve including the management of children’s services</p>