

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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

Direct T 0161 618 8207
Direct F 0161 618 8514
North_apa@ofsted.gov.uk

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Ms Joyce Thacker
Director of Children and Young People's Services
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Norfolk House
Walker Place
Rotherham
S65 1AS

Dear Ms Thacker

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Rotherham 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	2
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	2
Making a positive contribution	4
Achieving economic well-being	2
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

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council delivers services for children and young people which meet the minimum requirements for users. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services, is adequate. While the council has not sustained the level of outcomes for children across all areas compared with the 2007 APA, it has made adequate progress overall. The recent redesign of services to develop greater partnership working has been a priority for the council and the changes it has made have yet to fully demonstrate effectiveness across all areas of its work.

In all outcome areas the council has significant successes. The council is outstanding in enabling children and young people to make a positive contribution. In being healthy there are good levels of participation in and achievement of the Healthy School award, and in staying safe performance in initial and core assessments is good. Fewer schools in the borough are in an Ofsted category of concern following inspection than the national average; none are subject to special measures. The proportions of care leavers and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in employment, education or training are high.

In most outcomes areas these successes are balanced by aspects where further improvements can be made. For example, there are still too many teenage pregnancies. The fostering service was judged to be inadequate on inspection and although actions are underway to address the areas of weakness these have yet to be sufficiently effective. Performance by children of primary school age is not improving fast enough and level 2 and 3 achievements are too low for 16- to 19-year-olds.

Being healthy

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 overvalue the areas where progress has been made and a range of outcomes remain at adequate levels. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The percentage of schools achieving the Healthy School Award is higher than for statistical neighbours and 100% of schools are engaged in the National Healthy Schools Programme.▪ There is a comprehensive service for substance misuse resulting in a higher proportion of young people receiving substance misuse treatment than in statistical neighbours.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The teenage conception rate remains higher than that of statistical neighbours.

Staying safe**Grade 2**

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is inadequate. 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.

Major Strengths

- A higher percentage of initial and core assessments is completed on time when compared to statistical neighbours and the national average.
- The proportion of looked after children who were adopted during the year has improved to a high level.
- There has been a significant reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- The fostering service is inadequate. Too many placements are overcrowded resulting in children sharing bedrooms inappropriately and monitoring of placements is not robust. There are too few foster carers.
- Despite a statutory notice given to a council children's home to cease making emergency placements over their allocated number, the practice continues.

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 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.

Major Strengths

- The percentage of schools in an Ofsted category of concern is lower than nationally and in comparable councils. There are no schools in Special Measures. The majority of special schools have been judged to be outstanding.
- All floor targets for secondary schools have been surpassed.
- There have been good improvements in the progress made by young people at Key Stage 4.

- The percentage of young people who leave care aged 16 with five or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grade A* to C is much higher than nationally and in comparable councils.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Attainment at Key Stage 1 fell in 2007 despite this being identified as an area of weakness in last year's APA. The trend of improvement over time is below average for reading, writing and mathematics when compared to similar councils.
- Although there has been improvement in children's attainment in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2, standards remain below similar councils and the national average. The rate of progress being achieved in primary schools is not keeping pace with similar councils.
- Attendance in secondary schools is below that in 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 in this outcome area is consistent with the evidence. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths

- Rotherham Voice and Influence is recognised as good practice at a national level and the council was the first to receive the National Youth Agency Quality Mark.
- The rate of re-offending is below similar areas and the rate for looked after children and young people (now the 30th lowest in England) is falling.
- The participation of looked after children and young people in their reviews is very good.
- There is an excellent Children's Rights Service which supports looked after children and young people at reviews, strategy meetings and by acting as advocates.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

Achieving economic well-being

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"> ▪ The proportion of care leavers in employment, education or training is higher than nationally and similar council areas. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are in employment, education or training is very good. Almost twice as many as the national average are in work-based learning. ▪ Progress towards the introduction of the Diplomas for 14- to 19-year-olds is good and there is effective collaboration between providers. ▪ The average point score for 16- to 18-year-olds in GCE/VCE/A/AS improved in 2007 at a faster rate than similar council areas and are now in-line with the average of similar councils and nationally. ▪ Strategies to improve and sustain engagement post-16 are being successful. There have been year-on-year improvements in the number of 16-year-olds continuing in learning and a significant improvement over time in the number of apprenticeships being completed, which are now better than the average for similar council areas and nationally.
<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although the percentage of young people not in employment, education or training has reduced it is still above similar councils and national averages. ▪ Level 2 and Level 3 achievement is below similar neighbours and the national average.

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

Grade 2

The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is adequate. Its management of these services is also adequate. The recent redesign of services to develop greater partnership working has been a priority for the council. The establishment of the Children’s Trust and the appointment of a new Director for Children’s Services together with the redesigning of the service have the potential to bring about sustained improvements.

In its self-assessment, the council has over-estimated performance in some aspects, since the changes it has made have yet to fully demonstrate effectiveness across all areas of the its work. Overall progress has been adequate.

<p>Major strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership working is effective, with increased integration of services, particularly for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. ▪ Financial management is good. Expenditure on children in need has increased to a good level.

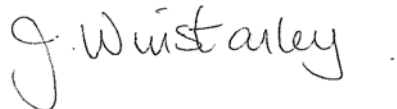
Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Management oversight for looked after children has not ensured they have been fully safeguarded.
- The council has overestimated its performance in some outcome areas.

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