

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
Textphone 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 020 7421 6666  
Direct F 020 7421 5633  
Juliet.Winstanley@ofsted.gov.uk



9 December 2010

Mr Andy Couldrick  
General Manager of Children's Services  
Wokingham Borough Council  
PO Box 156  
Shute End, Wokingham  
Berkshire RG40 1WQ

Dear Mr Couldrick

## Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in July 2010 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This performance profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the local authority has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant indicators in the National Indicator Set (NIS).

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of all inspected and regulated services for children and young people, arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against national measures. More weight has been given to the outcomes of Ofsted's inspections and regulatory visits (Blocks A and B in the performance profile).

The annual assessment derives from a four point scale:

4	Performs excellently	An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
3	Performs well	An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements
2	Performs adequately	An organisation that meets only minimum requirements
1	Performs poorly	An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements

Within each level there will be differing standards of provision. For example, an assessment of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, an assessment of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects. As in 2009, while the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's assessment, meeting or not meeting the minimum requirements alone does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

## Wokingham Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
--------------------------------	-------------------

Children's services in Wokingham Borough Council perform well. The local authority has achieved substantial and rapid improvement in key areas of safeguarding practice and provision, since a critical inspection in 2009 judged safeguarding arrangements to be inadequate. As a result, children's services overall were also judged as inadequate last year. A recent inspection found that the safeguarding has improved and is now adequate. The local authority's capacity to make further improvements has been strengthened and is also adequate.

The very large majority of other services and settings inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The large majority of early years and childcare, as well as nursery and primary schools, are at least good. The number of good or better secondary schools increased last year, but one in three remains satisfactory. Eight of the ten sixth forms in schools are good or better. Pupil referral units, children's homes, special schools and the fostering service continue to be strengths locally.

Performance measures show that a large majority of outcomes for children and young people are broadly average or better, but performance against the main measures of educational attainment is not as good. At the end of the reception year, children do not do as well as the average for similar areas. In contrast, national test and examination results for 11- and 16-year-olds are consistently above average and improving. The number of 19-year-olds gaining qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs, or two A-levels, is broadly average. The very small number of children from low-income families have achieved consistently improving results in recent years, and the attainment gap between them and the majority is closing. However, the attainment gap between the children and young people with special educational needs and the majority of those at age 11 and 16 is slower to close.

### Key areas for further development

- Continue to improve safeguarding arrangements and services for looked after children in line with the recommendations of the recent inspection.
- Improve secondary schools so that more are good or better.
- Close the gap in attainment between the majority of children and young people and those with special educational needs.

### Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of services and settings give good support to children and young people in living healthy lives. The number of children who are seriously overweight is below average, and the very large majority take part in regular sport and physical activities. The number of young women under the age of 18 who get

pregnant is well below average, with one of the fastest rates of reduction in the ten years to 2008 seen nationally. The number of mothers who breast-feed their babies is below average. Health outcomes for children in care are adequate. Screening for chlamydia, a sexually transmitted infection, is well below average and amongst the worst performance seen nationally.

The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is adequate. Good arrangements are in place in the very large majority of individual settings and services to help children and young people stay safe. Substantial improvement has been achieved in front-line child protection services over the last year. The different agencies involved have a clear understanding of when to refer children to social care services. Children and families who use these services feel they are listened to and value, in particular, the specialist support and counselling provided. Children, parents and carers are involved routinely in child protection planning. Services for children on the edge of care are adequate and improving. Key areas for development include the consistency of the quality of work to assess the needs of children, and the operation and capacity of the out-of-hours service. Services for children in care are adequate overall.

Provision to help children and young people achieve well and enjoy their learning is good in the very large majority of settings and services. The quality of schools overall is good, but a third of secondary schools are only satisfactory. Children's achievement at the end of the reception year is below average, but improving rapidly from a low base. Results for 11-year-olds have been consistently above average for some years. The number of 16-year-olds gaining five or more good GCSEs is also above average and improving at a faster rate than elsewhere. Children and young people from low-income families have achieved consistently improving results at the age of 11 and 16, and the attainment gap between them and the majority is closing. However, this is not the case for children and young people with special educational needs and the gap here is slower to close. Partnership work to raise the aspirations and attainment of children in care is improving and examination results are in line with the national figures, albeit with fluctuations due to the very small numbers involved. Behaviour in secondary schools is good and the numbers of children with poor school attendance is the same as the average for similar areas.

Arrangements to give children a say in decision-making are good in the very large majority of settings and services. A comparatively high number of children and young people are involved in organised leisure activities outside of school. By most measures, the youth offending service works reasonably well. Effective action is taken to steer children in care away from crime and anti-social behaviour. Re-offending by young people more generally is below that seen in similar areas, as is the number sent to custody on conviction in court. However, the number of young offenders in work, education or training is below the average for similar areas.

Children and young people get good support from the very large majority of services to gain the skills and qualifications they need for later life. The quality of sixth form schools has improved with the very large majority now judged good or better. The number of young people staying on in education or training after the compulsory school-leaving age is well above average and the numbers gaining qualifications

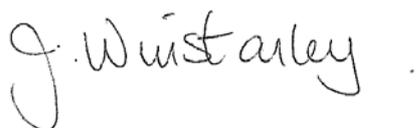
equivalent to five good GCSEs, or two A-levels, is about the same as seen elsewhere. However this is not the case for those from low-income families who, by age 19, gain far fewer qualifications than their peers in similar areas. The impact of partnership work to support and improve outcomes for care leavers is adequate overall, but more work is needed to ensure those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make a smooth transition into further education and adult social care services.

### **Prospects for improvement**

Much has been achieved in safeguarding since a new senior leadership team for children services was established just over a year ago. The local authority's capacity to make further improvements in safeguarding is adequate. Managers have had considerable success in tackling historical workforce difficulties in social care, but good performance management is not yet embedded. The focus and direction given by specialist external advisers have supported Wokingham in making good progress and local partners acknowledge the need to move towards more sustainable internal arrangements. Partnership work is satisfactory, but the implementation of the new Children and Young People's Plan is at an early stage. For example, more work is needed to develop a joint commissioning strategy and to establish comprehensive services to support the emotional and mental health needs of the most vulnerable children and young people. Children's services have yet to develop a strategic approach linking budgets, service development and shared partner and corporate objectives.

This children's services assessment is provided in accordance with section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment