

17 December 2010

Mr Simon White
Director for Children and Young People's Services
Suffolk County Council
Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk IP1 2BX

Dear Mr White

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.

Suffolk County Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Suffolk County Council perform well.

The large majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. All of the residential special schools and high numbers of pupil referral units, childminders, childcare providers, nursery schools, nursery classes in primary schools and primary schools are good or better. Since the 2009 assessment, the proportion of special schools that are good or better has risen. It is now slightly above the average for similar local authorities and close to the average for England. The proportion of good high schools is slightly lower than in similar areas, but higher than in the rest of England. A significant number of middle schools form part of secondary provision in Suffolk. A smaller proportion of middle schools are good compared to the high schools and just one is outstanding. The local authority fostering and adoption agencies are good, as are most of the local authority children's homes.

An unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services in July 2010 identified an area for priority action, one strength and several areas for development. A recent inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children reported they are both satisfactory.

National performance indicators show a very large majority of outcomes are in line or above the averages for England and for similar areas, with the exception of educational attainment. The attainment of children and young people in Suffolk aged five to 16 is not good enough and improvements have been slow in recent years, although they are better in 2010. Children and young people with special educational needs, or from low-income families, also do not do as well as they could in primary and secondary schools. Too many young people aged 16 to 18 take no part in education, training or work.

Key areas for further development

- Continue to improve the quality of safeguarding and services for looked after children.
- Improve educational standards for all children and young people aged five, 11 and 16 so they are at least as good as in similar areas.
- Rapidly reduce the number of 16- to 18-year-olds who take no part in education, training or work.

Outcomes for children and young people

Healthy lifestyles are promoted strongly in almost all local services, institutions and settings. Consequently, good progress is being made towards the two main health priorities in Suffolk of reducing obesity and supporting the emotional health of children and young people. Obesity amongst five- and 11-year-olds is reducing more rapidly than in similar areas, although levels of obesity vary in different parts of the county. Mental health services for children and young people, particularly for those with special educational needs or disabilities and for 16- and 17-year-olds, have been developed further. In a recent survey, the parents of disabled children expressed higher than average levels of satisfaction with health services. Local knowledge of how many mothers are still breast-feeding their six-week-old babies is good. However, the number has fallen over the last five years and is now lower than in similar areas. Preventative health care by the local authority for children and young people in care is good. However, a recent inspection found pathways to mental health services for this group of children and young people vary across the county.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good in schools and colleges. A recent inspection of safeguarding provision found it to be satisfactory. The quality of assessment and direct work with children and families is adequate. Since the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in July 2010, the local authority has taken prompt and appropriate action to address the areas for development and short-comings in social care practice. For example, all cases are allocated to social workers; no team managers are holding cases and the timescales for assessments are accurately recorded. Caseloads, however, remain variable in size and are still too high for some social workers. This results in delays in closing some cases in a timely way. Children at immediate risk of protection are appropriately identified and responded to in a timely way through good partnership working between agencies, including children's social care, the police and health staff. Arrangements for keeping children safe in the community are variable. Hospital admissions due to children being injured, both accidentally or deliberately, continue to fall and are consistently much lower than in similar areas or the rest of England. Children and young people consistently identify in surveys that bullying is a key issue of concern for them, although the percentage of children who have experienced bullying in Suffolk is less than reported by their peers regionally or nationally. Local services previous success in reducing the number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads has not been maintained and performance is now much worse than elsewhere. The local authority attributes this rise to an accident where a group of children were injured.

The local authority knows the achievement of children and young people in Suffolk aged five to 16 is not good enough. This is a key priority for improvement. The achievement of very young children is much lower than in similar areas. Provisional results for 2010 indicate they have improved by the largest amount for three years and by an equal amount to that in similar areas and the rest of England. Test results for 11-year-olds in 2009, placed Suffolk in the bottom 10 local authorities nationally. This is because not enough pupils are making sufficient progress in English and mathematics. Many more primary schools did not achieve the minimum expected

standards in 2009, reversing an improving trend in the previous three years. Provisional results for 2010 indicate an improvement which is in line with the national average. Examination results for 16-year-olds were much lower than in similar areas in 2009 and are also improving too slowly. Provisional results for 2010 indicate the largest improvement in the county for seven years, although this is less than the average for England as a whole. Behaviour is almost always good in secondary schools. Lower numbers of secondary aged pupils are regularly absent from school than in similar areas. The attendance of children in care is improving. Improvements to their achievement at the age of 11 in 2008 were not maintained in 2009. Nevertheless, the achievement of 16-year-olds in the care of the local authority was above average in 2009.

Almost all schools and other settings and services are good at involving children and young people in decision-making and activities in their communities. There are some good examples of the way in which looked after children and young people have influenced the way services for them are developed and their views are gathered by a range of methods. Fewer 16-year-olds report they have recently been drunk or taken drugs than in similar areas. By most measures, the Suffolk youth offending service is performing well. Rates of re-offending are falling, as are the numbers of young people offending for the first time and those who receive a custodial sentence for their offence. More young offenders take part in education and training than in similar areas, but not as many are found a suitable place to live. A recent inspection found a good range of sexual health services available to young people. Relatively low numbers of young women under the age of 18 become pregnant in Suffolk, although this varies considerably across the county, with the highest figures in Ipswich and Waverney. Numbers continue to fall at a faster than average rate except in Waverney where they are rising.

The local authority and its partners know a significant challenge for them is to increase the number of young people who continue with their education and training when they are aged 16 and 17. This is in a context of large areas of Suffolk being economically undeveloped and so providing fewer career opportunities for young people. More 16- and 17-year-olds are continuing with their learning and the proportion is getting closer to that in similar areas. However, too many young people aged 16 to 18 take no part in education, training or work. Nineteen-year-olds in Suffolk are as successful in gaining qualifications as those in similar areas and more young people from low-income families achieve well.

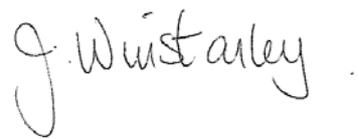
Prospects for improvement

The majority of outcomes for children and young people in Suffolk are improving. Improving the attainment of Suffolk's children and young people is the local authority's top priority and it is now providing stronger and more assertive leadership in driving up standards in its schools. The local authority, in its Children and Young People's Plan, demonstrates it knows what it needs to do. Provisional results for 2010 indicate improvements have been greater than in previous years, showing the newly targeted school improvement strategy is beginning to have a positive impact. Improvements have been particularly noteworthy in schools and other provision

which has received targeted support. However, the 2010 provisional results indicate the objective of raising standards for 11- and 16-year-olds to at least the national average has not been achieved. The local authority knows improvements need to be sustained and the pace increased for performance in Suffolk to begin to catch up with that in similar areas and the rest of England. Ofsted monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is providing satisfactory support to help them get better. A recent inspection reported safeguarding services are well led and managed and have good capacity to improve. Risks from budgetary pressures are well recognised and there is commitment from elected members to ensure that safeguarding and targeted services continue to be prioritised and protected as far as possible. Services for looked after children have adequate capacity to improve. Corporate parenting is at a very early stage of development and the scrutiny of services for looked after children is underdeveloped. Joint commissioning is effective and value-for-money is good.

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