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Ms Helen Watson
Director of Children's Services
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
Town Hall and Civic Offices
Westoe Road, South Shields
Tyne and Wear NE33 2RL

Dear Ms Watson

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.

South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council perform adequately.

In 2009, a transitional year, children's services performed well. However, in 2010, there is not enough good universal provision to meet the minimum requirement for this particular grade.

Inspections show that less than half of early years and childcare provision is good or better. Five of the nine secondary schools are satisfactory. Although the majority of nursery and primary schools are good, over a third are only satisfactory. This means that a high number of children and young people do not attend good schools. Ofsted identified that one secondary and two primary schools required significant improvement. One school sixth form is outstanding. The general further education and tertiary college is satisfactory. Much special provision for particular groups of young people is good. This includes the special schools, the pupil referral unit and the local authority children's homes. The fostering agency is good and the adoption agency is outstanding.

The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was strong and no areas for priority action.

National performance measures show that the very large majority of outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England or similar areas. Performance in tests and examinations matches similar areas. Pupils with special educational needs make at least satisfactory progress from their starting point; however an insufficient proportion of 16-year-olds achieve good GCSEs including English and mathematics. Educational outcomes for young people from low-income families are rising and there has been a good reduction in the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant.

Key areas for further development

- Improve early years and childcare settings so that more are good or better.
- Improve primary and secondary schools so that more are good or better.
- Increase the proportion of 16-year-olds with special educational needs who achieve good GCSEs including English and mathematics.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives have been successful in several areas. For example more young people take part in sport regularly and the proportion of five-year-olds who are overweight is dropping. Fewer young women under the age of 18 become pregnant. The Children and Young People's Plan rightly identifies the need to develop a full range of services for children and young people who have emotional and mental health difficulties. It also recognises that more needs to be done to reduce the proportion of young people who say that they have been drunk or have taken drugs. Most inspected schools and settings promote healthy lifestyles, although childminders score less highly in this aspect. The two local authority children's homes and the fostering agency promote good health.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. Schools, colleges and the two children's homes protect children well and fewer young people fear bullying. Arrangements for ensuring that children are safe within the community are strong. For example, the number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads is low, and fewer are admitted to hospital because they have been injured accidentally or deliberately. The 2010-2013 Children and Young People's Plan rightly includes actions to protect children from the impact of domestic violence and to support families who face challenging circumstances. The inspection of front-line child protection services found that assessments were completed on time and that their quality was at least satisfactory. It also reported that suitable attention was given to address the diverse needs of children and families and that links with minority ethnic groups were effective. Managers, senior managers and the Local Safeguarding Children Board undertake robust audits of the referral and assessment service.

The majority of primary schools help children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Results for 11-year-olds match those in similar areas. In 2009, the rate of progress in mathematics was not as strong as in English. The most recent results in 2010 show improvement. Standards have risen in secondary schools and GCSE results are as good as similar areas. Provisional GCSE results for 2010 have risen significantly. In almost half of the secondary schools, however, educational progress is not as rapid as it could be. The local authority recognises this. One of the key priorities of the 2010-2013 Children and Young People's Plan is to increase the proportion of good and outstanding schools. Targeted support in schools requires renewed focus to ensure that more young people with special educational needs obtain good GCSEs at grades A*-C. The local authority monitors the number of fixed-term exclusions of young people with special educational needs and reports a significant reduction in 2009/10. Support for weaker schools is effective. For example, an Ofsted monitoring visit to the inadequate secondary school reports that the support provided by the local authority and by a local technology college has had a good impact, and that the school is making good progress. Ofsted judged that provision in the different centres for excluded pupils is overall good, but achievement is curtailed by poor attendance, especially as pupils get older.

Most schools and other settings are good at involving young people in making decisions and contributing positively to their communities. South Tyneside has a wide range of consultation mechanisms. Renewed energy has been placed on improving participation further so that more children and young people influence improvements to services. Particular efforts are made to engage those with specific needs, such as young people caring for a family member and those who are disabled. This is reflected in the priorities chosen for improvement in the Children and Young People's Plan, such as ensuring that parents or carers have easy access to a single point of contact when they need support for their child. The local authority has identified several key issues to address. This includes tackling perceptions of anti-social behaviour where it is a key issue for local residents in specific neighbourhoods. The latest data shows that the number of young people who break the law for the first time is reducing. However, more young people than in similar areas break the law more than once and fewer young offenders are engaged in education, work or training.

Reducing child poverty is rightly identified as a key priority in the Children and Young People's Plan. The child poverty project, in partnership with North Tyneside, provides additional capacity and resource. The quality of early years and childcare provision requires further improvement to give children a good start in life. The work done to ensure that young people do as well as they can by the age of 19 has been mostly successful. The number gaining good qualifications is improving and is as good as in similar areas. Young people from low-income families are doing better than in previous years. However, recent data show that only just over half of care leavers are in education, work or training. Most schools, including the special schools, are helping to prepare young people for work or training post 16. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training matches similar areas and targets have been achieved despite the challenging economic context. More apprenticeships are available for specific groups of young people. The local authority has analysed the movement of students and many have access to a choice of good colleges across Tyne and Wear. The inspection of South Tyneside College reported that the college had good links with local schools but the impact of some projects had yet to be demonstrated and opportunities for work placements or work experience were insufficient.

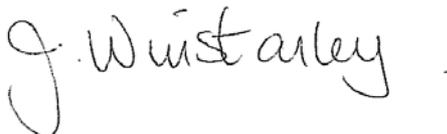
Prospects for improvement

Most outcomes for children and young people are improving in South Tyneside but some schools and childcare settings are not contributing enough to this overall improvement. The local authority demonstrates that it can improve satisfactory schools to good, because actions to support schools judged inadequate have been effective. However, there is still too much universal provision that is only adequate. Provisional 2010 results in the early years foundation stage, in national tests for 11-year-olds and at GCSE show improvement. The Children and Young People's Plan indicates that the right priorities have been chosen to drive improvement further. All possible funds are pooled to deliver the plan. For example, the *Transforming Our Primary Schools* (TOPS) project aims to reduce surplus places and raise standards at age 11. Work with health partners provides additional capacity to improve services

for young people with emotional or mental health difficulties. The December 2009 inspection of the youth offending service judged that much had improved since a critical 2008 inspection and that prospects for the future were positive.

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 style with a large initial 'J' and a period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment