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8 November 2011

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

Dear Mr White

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services 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 other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or 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 2010, 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 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs well (3)
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Children's services in Suffolk County Council perform well. This performance has been sustained from 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. The large majority of provision helps children and young people to stay safe and most supports them effectively to enjoy their learning. Changes to middle and high school provision are taking place and some schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgments for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment. Areas of strength remain largely the same as last year, with further improvements in provision and progress in addressing most key areas for improvement identified in last year's assessment.

A full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children in December 2010 found adequate provision for both. In July 2011, Ofsted's annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found two strengths, many areas where practice met requirements and continued improvement in the quality of safeguarding services. The priority area for urgent action and almost all areas for development identified in the previous annual inspection have been addressed.

Strengths

- Slightly more early years and childcare provision is at least good this year. Almost all provision in registered day-care providers and the large majority of childminders are good or better. Six of the seven children's centres inspected for the first time during the year are good or outstanding.
- For children under five, provision in nursery and primary schools continues to be effective with the very large majority of providers being at least good. The proportion of five-year-olds achieving a good level of development is rising over time, but not at the same rate as found nationally and fewer achieve the expected level than found in similar areas.
- The local authority provides effective support to the small number of schools that are in Ofsted's categories of concern, both in the advice and guidance it provides and in brokering support from others.
- Slightly more specialist provision is good or better than last year, including seven of the eight special schools, all secondary special sixth forms and almost all pupil referral units.
- For looked after children, local authority fostering and adoption services are good. So too are most independent fostering agencies commissioned by the local authority, with almost a half outstanding. Local authority children's homes have improved and all four are now good and the large

majority of private and voluntary run homes used by the local authority to place children in their care are good or better.

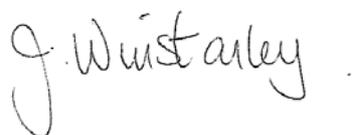
- Attainment for 16- and 19-year-olds from low-income families is improving and the gap in their achievement with their peers in Suffolk is reducing.

Areas for further improvement

- Slightly more lower schools than last year are inadequate and the proportion of children making the expected progress between seven and 11 years of age is below elsewhere. Although the proportion of 11-year-olds achieving the expected level in national tests for both English and mathematics improved this year, attainment continues to be below similar areas and national averages.
- The proportion of good or better provision for secondary age pupils continues to be below similar areas and national averages. However, one of the three schools in Ofsted categories of concern has addressed the areas of weakness and is now satisfactory. Just over half of 16-year-olds achieve five A* to C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE. However, the rate of improvement is not as fast as that found elsewhere and so attainment continues to be below similar areas.
- Some key areas of provision remain only satisfactory. Although all provision for learning after the age of 16 is satisfactory or better, only one of the eight high school sixth forms inspected during the last academic year showed good overall performance. Only two of the four colleges of further education are good.
- As with last year, the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, training or work remains higher than elsewhere.

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'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment