

9 December 2009

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

Children's services annual rating

Ofsted guidance published in May 2009 explained that the annual rating would derive from a new performance profile of the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people in each local area. This profile includes findings from across Ofsted's inspection and regulation of services and settings for which the council has strategic or operational responsibilities, either alone or in partnership with others, together with data from the relevant *Every Child Matters* indicators in the new National Indicator Set (NIS).

In considering the evidence in the profile to determine the children's services rating for 2009 it has become clear that the continuing gaps in the data are significant, particularly those relating to aspects of social care and services for Looked After Children. Ofsted has decided therefore to use 2009 as a transitional year easing into the full application of the new system in 2010. As a consequence, although the performance profile remains central to Ofsted's rating, we have interpreted the performance bands with flexibility and exercised professional judgement with caution.

The annual rating 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, a rating of 'performs excellently' does not mean all aspects of provision are perfect. Similarly, a rating of 'performs poorly' does not mean there are no adequate or even good aspects.

Children's services rating 2009

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

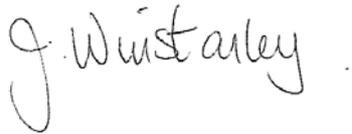
The overall effectiveness of a large majority of inspected and regulated services and settings is good or better. A higher than average proportion of childminders, childcare settings and primary schools are good and only a small amount of provision has been judged to be inadequate. The proportion of good nursery provision is higher than found in similar areas and in line with the national average. The proportion of good secondary schools is also in line with the national average, but lower than that found in similar areas. A significant number of middle schools form part of secondary provision in Suffolk. None are outstanding and a smaller proportion is good compared to the high schools. The proportion of good or better post-16 provision both in school sixth forms and further education colleges is lower than that found in similar areas and nationally.

Specialist provision and services for children and young people whose circumstances make them more vulnerable are mostly good. A higher than average proportion of special schools and pupil referral units are good or outstanding. The 2007 joint area review judged safeguarding and services for children in the care of the local authority as good. Since then inspections have judged the local authority's fostering and adoption agencies as good and its private fostering arrangements as outstanding. The proportion of children's homes that are good is in line with the national average but below those found in similar areas, and one of the five children's homes is inadequate. Three serious cases reviews have been undertaken during the period April 2007 to 2009, the first was conducted well, the second inadequately and the third was adequate.

Performance against a very large majority of indicators, including those for staying safe, is in line with similar areas and the national average. However, improvements in test and examination results for pupils aged 11 and 16 have slowed in recent years and performance has fallen to well below that found in similar areas and nationally for 11-year-olds. The difference in performance of children and young people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable is too wide. Pupils from lower income families and those who are identified as having special educational needs perform poorly when they are aged 11. Consequently, the achievement gap with their peers is much larger than that found in similar areas and nationally. For 16-year-olds the gap is in line with similar areas, but larger than the national average. This position is maintained for the achievement of level 3 qualifications at age 19. Their achievement of level 2 qualifications is better than in similar areas and nationally so the gap is smaller.

The children's services rating is provided for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The rating of local authority children's services will contribute significantly to the managing performance theme of each local authority's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment and therefore to the score for each local authority overall.

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, CAA