

9 December 2009

Ms Lisa Christensen
Director of Children's Services
Norfolk County Council
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
Norfolk
NR1 2DL

Dear Ms Christensen

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 Norfolk County Council perform well.

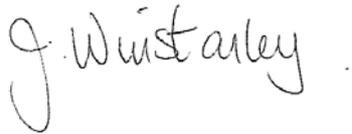
The proportion of childminders and childcare settings that are good or better is broadly in line with similar areas and above the national average. However, the proportion of good or better nursery provision, primary and secondary schools and school sixth forms is smaller than in similar areas and nationally. Post-16 provision is almost all good or better when provided by the two sixth form colleges in the county or the four further educational colleges. Primary and secondary schools and school sixth forms do not do as well as those in similar areas in making a good contribution to children and young people achieving economic well-being and enjoying and achieving.

Specialist provision and services for children and young people whose circumstances make them more vulnerable are mostly good. A very high proportion of special schools and children's homes are good or outstanding, but fewer than average pupil referral units perform to this level. The local authority's fostering and adoption agencies are good, but private fostering arrangements are inadequate. The 2008 joint area review judged safeguarding and services for children in the care of the local authority as good. Four serious case reviews have been undertaken during the period April 2007 to July 2009; three were conducted adequately and one was inadequate.

Performance against a large majority of national indicators, including those for staying safe is broadly in line with similar areas and the national average. However, current outcomes show achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is broadly average but has been declining for the last four years. Test results at age 11 remain below average, and the rate of improvement in Norfolk primary schools is slower than the national average so the gap is widening. Examination results at age 16 are average overall and, while the rate of improvement has been faster than in similar areas, it is slower than that in England as a whole. Some secondary schools are finding it difficult to bring about and sustain improvements so standards remain low in these schools. The achievement of both level 2 and level 3 qualifications is much smaller in Norfolk than in similar areas and the rate of improvement over the last four years has been too slow. Pupils from lower income families and those who have been identified as having special educational needs achieve relatively well at age 16 compared to those in similar authorities. However, the achievement gap between these pupils and their peers at age 11 is too large and is not being reduced sufficiently quickly. The achievement of Level 3 qualifications by young people from lower income families is better than in similar areas and in line with the national average. The percentage who progress to higher education matches that in similar areas but is just below the national average.

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