

9 December 2010

Ms Gill Rollings  
Executive Director, Children, Families and Learning  
Middlesbrough Borough Council  
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Dear Ms Rollings

## 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.

## Middlesbrough Borough Council children's services assessment 2010

<b>Children's services assessment</b>	<b>Performs adequately (2)</b>
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Children's services in Middlesbrough Borough Council perform adequately.

Children's services performed adequately in 2009. This is still the case in 2010 because, despite some improvement in overall performance, there is insufficient good or better provision to meet the minimum requirement for a higher grade. Three of the seven secondary schools are good or better, but three are only satisfactory and one requires significant improvement. One of the three pupil referral units is inadequate. Early years and childcare provision is more adequate than good as is much of the post-16 provision. In contrast, the very large majority of nurseries, primary and special schools are good or better. The sixth forms in schools are good. The fostering and adoption agencies and the local authority children's home are also good.

The unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services found much that was at least satisfactory, with some strengths and no areas for priority action.

National measures of performance show that the large majority of outcomes are in line with those for similar areas or England. Results for 11-year-olds and 16-year-olds are below those of similar areas, although provisional results for 2010 show improvement. In recent years, outcomes by the age of 19 have risen and match those of similar areas, including for young people from low-income families. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, work or training matches those of similar areas. Not all children do as well as they should; in particular, five-year-olds from low-income families and 11-year-olds who have special educational needs do less well than children of the same age in similar areas. Persistent absence in secondary schools is a weakness.

### Key areas for further development

- Improve secondary schools so that more are good or better.
- Bring adequate provision to good in early years so that children, particularly those from low-income families, get a good start at school.
- Reduce persistent absence in secondary schools.
- Raise standards for 11-year-olds who have special educational needs.

## Outcomes for children and young people

The very large majority of schools and the children's homes are good at promoting healthy lifestyles. In primary schools, more children have school lunches. The number of 11-year-olds who are overweight is reducing and more children than in similar areas take part in physical education and sport. The 2008-2011 Children and Young People's Plan explains clearly how local arrangements encourage children and young people to live healthy lives, focusing on health inequalities across neighbourhoods. The local authority acknowledges that more needs to be done in key areas. For example, a full range of services for those with emotional or mental health difficulties are not yet in place and although not worse than in similar areas, too many 16-year-olds say that they have recently been drunk or taken drugs. Efforts to reduce the number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant have been successful.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. Inspections show that schools, childminders and colleges are good at this. The local authority recognised that bullying was an issue for many young people and actions taken in partnership with schools, youth centres and other settings have reduced incidents. The inspection of front-line child protection services found that there is a robust action plan in place to address known areas for development and this has ensured improvements in key areas, such as the timely completion of assessments. The arrangements to support children and families where English is not their first language are effective. Recent social care data show satisfactory performance in most areas, although not enough reviews for children in care are completed on time. The Children and Young People's Plan recognises that domestic violence in the home and parents drinking too much or taking drugs are often the cause of problems for children. The *Families First* project aims to consider the needs of the family as a whole and not just the child in need.

Nurseries, most primary schools and four of the seven secondary schools, including the school sixth forms, are good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Most of the special schools, including the special sixth forms, ensure that pupils progress well from their starting point. Ofsted monitoring visits show that the local authority is working effectively to support the two inadequate schools and the inadequate pupil referral unit. Plans are in hand to improve and re-organise provision in the small inadequate sixth form college. Despite the very large majority of good or better primary schools, an above average number do not reach the expected levels and overall results in national tests have been below those of similar authorities for several years. However, the 2010 provisional results for 11-year-olds show improvement. Raising standards at GCSEs is central to the Children and Young People's Plan. Although below those of similar areas, GCSE results have risen year-on-year, and significantly in 2010. Secondary schools have successfully improved the educational outcomes of young people with special educational needs and those from low-income families who do as well as similar groups nationally. The local authority recognises that adequate secondary schools require more support to increase the rate of students' progress. Behaviour is good in most secondary schools

but low attendance in some secondary schools affects the students' educational success.

Almost all schools and the colleges are good at involving young people in making decisions and encouraging them to contribute to their communities. The latest monitoring visit to the weaker pupil referral unit shows that young people who have challenging behaviour are more positive about their learning and exclusions have reduced significantly. The local authority has long-established arrangements for involving children and young people through its *Involvement and Communication Strategy*. Young people have shown that they are keen to be involved through the Local Democracy Week. The Children and Young People's Plan identifies the need to involve even more children from specific groups, such as those from minority ethnic communities, disabled children and young people who care for a parent or member of their family. In some areas performance is not improving. Although fewer young people break the law for the first time, too many re-offend. The above-average proportion of young people being drunk or taking drugs is also a concern. Thorough analysis of local data has shown that alcohol is a key factor to young people committing offences. On a positive note, a high proportion of those who offend are in work, employment or education.

Over several years, tackling poverty, raising aspirations and reducing economic disadvantage have been key priorities in Middlesbrough. Joint efforts between the local authority, schools, employers and other partners have been successful and there has been improvement in most aspects. In all measures of performance, by the age of 19, young people in Middlesbrough do as well as those in similar areas. An increasing number gain good GCSEs, GCE A levels or equivalent qualifications. Outcomes of young people from low-income families are also improving and they do as well as those in similar areas. More families with low income make use of the funding available for childcare. Young people who leave care are helped to find a suitable place to live through the *Supporting Lodging Scheme* and more than in previous years are in work, education or training. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds in education, work or training has been successfully increased. The Children and Young People's Plan acknowledges that further support is needed for young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable, in particular young people living in poverty and those who have complex physical, emotional and learning disabilities.

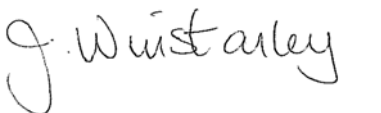
### **Prospects for improvement**

The majority of outcomes for children and young people are improving in Middlesbrough, however more needs to be done to improve some secondary schools and to reduce the number of young people who are persistently absent from school. In some important areas, improvement has been good. For example, more children start school with better communication, emotional and social development and the target set for achievement at the end of the reception year has been exceeded. The 2008-2011 Children and Young People's Plan is tackling the right priorities, with strong focus on specific groups of young people who do not achieve enough with initiatives in hotspots where things are not getting better. The Children and Young People's Plan provides a realistic overview of areas for improvement in health. Ofsted

monitoring visits to weaker schools show that the local authority is effective in helping them get better. The inspection of the youth offending service in January 2010 reported that the service works reasonably well and has good capacity to improve its performance.

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 trailing dot at the end.

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment