

9 December 2010

Ms Frankie Sulke
Executive Director for Children and Young People
London Borough of Lewisham
3rd Floor, Laurence House
1 Catford Road
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Dear Ms Sulke

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.

London Borough of Lewisham children's services assessment 2010

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in the London Borough of Lewisham perform excellently.

The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. Overall there is little inadequate provision. The majority of early years and child care provision is good or better, as are the large majority of both primary and secondary schools. Post-16 provision is strong overall because over 70% of school sixth forms are good or better, the general further education college is outstanding and the sixth form college is good. There is a higher proportion of good or better post-16 provision in Lewisham than elsewhere.

The local authority's fostering and adoption agencies are both good. Four of the six special schools are outstanding and two are good. The pupil referral unit is also good. There are no local authority children's homes and all children in the care of the local authority are in private and voluntary provision that is at least adequate.

The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services was highly positive, identifying many strengths and no areas requiring urgent action.

The children's services assessment judgement is supported by performance that is at least in line with the appropriate comparators for a very large majority of national indicators, including those for educational attainment. Although improving, the numbers of young people with poor attendance at secondary school is higher than the average in similar areas. The difference in performance between most groups of children and young people whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, such as the lower achievers at the age of five, and their peers is closing. Strategies to raise the results of children and young people from low-income families are proving successful. However, the teenage pregnancy rate remains high, despite a rate of reduction that is slightly better than the average for England and London.

Key areas for further development

- Reduce the teenage pregnancy rate.
- Reduce the numbers of young people with poor attendance at secondary school.

Outcomes for children and young people

Most services and settings are good at encouraging children and young people to be healthy. There have been some further improvements in performance, for example, more mothers are breast-feeding their babies six weeks after birth than the average for similar areas and the local authority report good progress in reducing the number

of low birth weight babies. Strategies to reduce the number of 11-year-olds that are seriously overweight are having some success, but there has been an increase in obesity amongst five-year-olds. Levels are broadly average overall. Improvements have been made to child and adolescent mental health services and the introduction of targeted services in schools is making sure children and young people with emotional health and well-being difficulties are reached earlier. Lewisham now has the fourth highest rate of teenage conceptions nationally. Although the overall rate of reduction over the last decade is better than the average for England and London, the local authority recognises that the rate remains too high, particularly for the youngest teenagers. A higher than average proportion of young people has been screened for chlamydia to improve their sexual health.

Arrangements for helping children and young people to stay safe are good in most services and settings. The recent unannounced inspection of front-line child protection services was very positive. There is a strong emphasis on early intervention and prevention across the borough and the use of common approaches to the assessment of children's needs is now well established and used by a wide range of agencies to ensure that children receive the appropriate support. Guidelines on when to refer children and young people to social care services are clear and used effectively by partner agencies, ensuring children and young people whose circumstances have made them vulnerable are promptly identified and supported.

The very large majority of all types of settings and services provide good opportunities for children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Special school provision for children with complex learning needs and/or disabilities is especially strong in the borough. Following three years of improvement at a faster pace than the average for similar areas, children at the end of their Reception Year at school now achieve better outcomes and performance is in line with similar areas. The gap between the lower achievers and their peers at this age is reducing. Test results for children at the end of primary school are broadly average. There was a slight dip in performance in 2009 and more schools did not meet the minimum standards in these tests than in the previous year. However, provisional results for 2010 show good improvement, especially for boys. There has been year-on-year improvement in the numbers of young people achieving five good GCSEs at the age of 16. Results are broadly in line with the average in similar areas. There is a trend of improvement in the results of children and young people from low-income families across the age groups. The Black Pupils' Achievement Programme is making a difference to the aspirations and ambitions of Black young people in Lewisham, as can be seen through improved GCSE results. There are good standards of behaviour in the very large majority of secondary schools and schools are successfully improving behaviour by showing children and young people the consequences of disruptive actions. However, although improving, the number of young people missing large amounts of secondary schooling due to poor attendance is still higher than the average in similar areas.

Good arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services are well established in the work of the local authority and their partners. Schools and colleges are particularly good at this. Opportunities for

young people to participate have increased further through the new young citizen's panel, which helps children and young people have a say in local authority decision-making and to shape the services they use. The youth offending service is performing adequately against the national indicators and has excellent capacity and capability to sustain and improve its performance. The numbers of young people re-offending is higher than in similar areas. The high proportion of young people getting custodial sentences is linked to the borough's determination to tackle serious youth violence. This has meant that robust enforcement strategies agreed by the local authority and its partners have increased the borough's use of custody where appropriate.

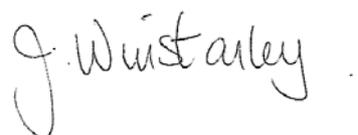
The local authority and its partners work very well together to provide high quality services that enable young people to overcome barriers to education, work or training. The numbers of 16- to 18-year-olds that are not participating is lower than in similar areas and continues to fall. The number of young people gaining qualifications by the age of 19 continues to improve and is now broadly average. Post-16 provision is strong overall and young people now have access to a wider range of choices, including diploma courses.

Prospects for improvement

The local authority and its partners continue to drive improvement in services and outcomes for children and young people. A clear vision and high ambitions are set out in the Children and Young People's Plan which was developed following full consultation with partners, including children and young people. Progress has been made in each of the four key areas: early intervention and family support; raising aspirations and closing the gaps; reducing child poverty and its impact and strengthening the positive influence of young people. The plan has been thoroughly reviewed in 2010 and the local authority's priorities remain relevant and challenging. There is a realistic understanding of what still needs to be done, such as reducing the teenage conception rate further. The key goal for 2010–2011 is to maintain good progress in the context of reducing resources and work is already underway to achieve this.

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, flowing style.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment