

9 December 2010

Mr Gareth Williams
Director of Children and Young People's Service
Leicestershire County Council
Room 115, County Hall
Glenfield
Leicestershire LE3 8RF

Dear Mr Williams

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:

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|---|----------------------|---|
| 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 along does not define the grade. The assessment has involved the application of inspector judgement.

Leicestershire County Council children's services assessment 2010

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|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Children's services assessment | Performs well (3) |
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Children's services in Leicestershire County Council perform well.

The large majority of types of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better. For example, the large majority of early years and childcare is good. Almost all secondary schools are good and a quarter of them are outstanding. However, only about a half of secondary sixth forms and colleges are good. Improvements during the last year are reflected in the increasing number of effective primary schools. Two thirds are now good or better. The six local authority special schools are all good or better, as are the independent special schools and a specialist college located in Leicestershire. The unsatisfactory pupil referral unit is receiving good support from the local authority to bring about improvements. The local fostering and adoption agencies are adequate. In the last year an inadequate children's home has closed and both remaining local authority children's homes have been judged as outstanding by inspectors.

A joint area review, carried out in February 2008, identified good arrangements for safeguarding children and young people and good provision for those looked after by the local authority. A more recent inspection of front-line child protection services identified much satisfactory provision, but also a range of areas for further development. However, no issues were deemed to be putting children whose circumstances make them vulnerable at risk of harm.

National performance measures show almost all outcomes are in line with or above the averages for England and for similar areas. Results in national tests and examinations are above average for 11-year-olds and 16-year-olds do better than their peers elsewhere. However, these good results hide an increasing gap in achievement for 16- and 19-year-olds from low-income families and their peers. More than a half of all 19-year-olds gain higher qualifications. By comparison, just over a quarter of those from low-income families do as well. Young people with special educational needs do less well at the age of 16 than others of the same age nationally. In recent years, there has been a steady increase in the number of 16- to 18-year-olds in education, employment or training. This is better than elsewhere.

Key areas for further development

- Continue to increase the number of young people from low-income families who gain good qualifications
- Improve provision in secondary sixth forms so more are good or better.

Outcomes for children and young people

Local arrangements to encourage children and young people to live healthy lives are usually successful. Nearly all childcare providers, schools and colleges are good at this, although the pupil referral unit does not do as well. More young people than elsewhere say they have positive relationships with friends and family.

Improvements have been made in providing access to mental health services.

Increasing numbers of mothers are still breast-feeding their babies when they are six- to eight-weeks-old. Obesity levels remain below elsewhere for five- and 11-year-olds; however, the number of overweight children is increasing. More children and young people are regularly taking part in sporting activities as the result of successful local authority action to bring about improvements. The number of young women under the age of 18 who become pregnant is falling, but not as fast as elsewhere.

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are almost always good. Ofsted inspections of primary, secondary and special schools and colleges confirm this. The local adoption agency provides an outstanding range of support in helping maintain permanent families for children. Good local services work well together to identify children and families in need of support, including those with complex needs and disabilities. Speedier assessment and access to appropriate services have been achieved through changing the way agencies work together. However, the thresholds for starting formal child protection enquiries are too high. This reduces the potential for some children whose circumstances have made them very vulnerable to access prompt multi-agency assessment or monitoring of their needs. There are strengths in the arrangements for ensuring that children are safe within the community. For example, the number of children killed or seriously injured on the roads is reducing faster than elsewhere and a recent survey found fewer young people feel bullied than in previous years.

Nursery, primary and secondary schools and colleges are usually good at helping children and young people to do well and enjoy their learning. Provision in special schools is always good. However, this is the case for only two thirds of childminders. The local authority is successful in its work to help all schools get better. This is reflected in the increasing number of good or better primary school inspection judgments since 2009. Children at ages 11 and 16 do better in national tests and examination than those in similar areas. Standards have risen faster than elsewhere in secondary schools and, by the age of 16, more than a half of young people gain five or more good GCSEs including mathematics and English. Behaviour is good in almost all secondary schools. The focus on reducing the gap between how well children and young people from low-income families do and their peers, has shown some improvement in primary school test results, but not in examination results at the age of 16.

Very successful arrangements for involving children and young people in planning and reviewing local services have been in place for a long time. These are continually reviewed and following consultation with young people, opportunities have been introduced to involve them in planning services at both a strategic and operational level. Almost all schools and other settings are good at involving young people in

decision making and activity in their communities. During 2010, *Find Your Talent Leicestershire* provided 50,000 children with the opportunity to engage with arts and leisure activities. Further developments are planned through locality-based integrated youth support services designed to engage and involve young people in positive activities. Rates of young people offending for the first time are reducing quickly, as are the rates for re-offending.

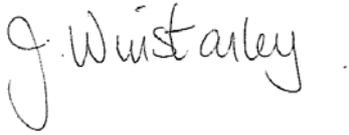
Young people have an increasing range of choice through diplomas, apprenticeships and post-16 learning to develop work-based skills and qualifications. Ambitious local targets for engaging young people in education, training or employment between 16 and 18 years have been exceeded, with more young people, including young offenders and care leavers, engaged than elsewhere. Overall, 19-year-olds obtain more qualifications than their peers nationally. The local authority knows that not all young people from low-income families do as well as they should at the age of 19. This is a key priority for improvement and over time, results are getting better so the gap in achievement with their peers is closing. Almost all secondary schools and all colleges offer good support to help young people gain the skills and qualifications needed for future jobs. An Ofsted Inspection of adult learning identified much good practice in supporting the development of work place skills.

Prospects for improvement

Almost all outcomes for children and young people in Leicestershire are better than elsewhere or improving. A robust system of performance management and a rigorous partnership approach to on-going improvement is reflected in local action plans and improving outcomes in many areas. Lessons learnt from self-review or external inspection are usually acted on promptly and progress monitored effectively. However, inspection by Ofsted of front-line child protection services identified that performance development reviews are not routinely undertaken to identify provision development and training requirements. The review of the Children and Young People's Plan demonstrates good progress in important areas; it is also clear about what still needs to be done and targets for improvement are in place. For example, although performance compares well with elsewhere, strategies have been introduced to tackle obesity and teenage pregnancy. Tackling the right priorities and good partnership working are demonstrated through clear improvements in health outcomes and educational provision, including good local authority support to the inadequate pupil referral unit. Over time, strong leadership and effective multi-agency partnership working arrangements have effectively identified and delivered improvements.

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 period at the end.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment