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Ms Lisa Christensen
Director of Children's Services
Norfolk County Council
Children's Services
County Hall, Martineau Lane
Norwich, Norfolk
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Dear Ms Christensen

Annual children's services assessment

Ofsted guidance published in April 2011 explains that the annual assessment of children's services is derived from the performance profile of the quality of services 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 other published data.

In reaching the assessment of children's services, Ofsted has taken account of inspection outcomes including the arrangements for making sure children are safe and stay safe and performance against similar authorities and/or 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 2010, 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.

Norfolk County Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs adequately (2)
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Children's services in Norfolk County Council perform adequately in 2011, as in 2010. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or outstanding and most provision helps children to learn and stay safe. The main strengths and key areas for development remain similar to last year. Progress is being made in nearly all areas but not significantly so, nor fast enough. In this academic year five secondary schools and two primary schools have gained academy status since last year and these inspection judgements have been taken into account in this year's assessment.

In 2011 a full inspection of safeguarding and services for looked after children judged both as adequate, with adequate capacity to improve. Core requirements for safeguarding are being met but for looked after children, outcomes for health and economic well-being are inadequate.

Strengths

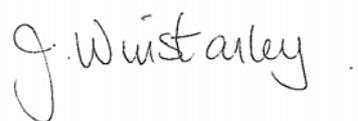
- Early years and childcare provision is good in the large majority of settings. All children's centres that have been inspected for the first time this year are good or outstanding. Achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with similar areas and nationally and satisfactory progress has been made since 2009.
- In 2011, provisional results in the national tests for 11-year-olds show marginal improvement and girls continue to achieve better than boys. In 2010 children achieved well below those in similar areas and nationally. Slightly more primary schools than last year are now good or outstanding. At age 16, standards for young people achieving at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, are in line with similar areas and nationally and the rate of improvement has been gradual but steady for four years. At this age, young people from low-income families and those with special educational needs do slightly better than their peers in similar areas.
- Special schools are consistently good and six are outstanding, as are the three residential special schools. Most other provision for children and young people with additional or special educational needs is good or outstanding and this performance has been maintained since 2010.
- All of the local authority children's homes are now good or outstanding, showing improvement since 2010, as are most of those homes commissioned by the local authority. However two are inadequate. Local authority fostering arrangements are good and the local adoption agency is outstanding.

Areas for further improvement

- Although showing some improvement from last year, a lower proportion of children, including those from low-income families, achieve a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage than elsewhere.
- More secondary schools are now satisfactory, showing a decline in good and outstanding performance since last year. This is worse than similar areas and nationally. Less than half are now good or outstanding and two schools remain in a category of concern. Monitoring reports state that both are making satisfactory progress with support from the local authority.
- Provision for young people who continue in further education or training on leaving school remains variable. Twelve out of 21 secondary school sixth forms are good, with nine which are satisfactory. Of the four further education colleges, three are good or outstanding, but one is now inadequate.
- Fewer young people achieve national qualifications by the age of 19 than elsewhere and this has not improved significantly since last year. Young people from low-income families achieving higher level 3 qualifications do less well than their peers in Norfolk and elsewhere, and the attainment gap has widened. While improvement has been consistent over time the numbers of 17-year-olds who participate in education and training remain lower than in similar areas.

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'.

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment