

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 020 7421 6666
Direct F 020 7421 5633
Juliet.Winstanley@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Pete Dwyer
Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services
City of York Council
Mill House
North Street
York
North Yorkshire YO1 6JD

Dear Mr Dwyer

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.

City of York Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs excellently (4)
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Children's services in City of York Council continue to perform excellently. This high performance has been sustained from 2010 to 2011. The large majority of services and settings inspected by Ofsted are good or better overall and the very large majority provide high quality support to help children and young people learn and stay safe. The strengths and areas for improvement have not changed significantly since last year. Since then, two secondary schools have become academies. The most recent inspection judgements on these schools have been taken into account in this assessment.

A recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection found clear strengths and no areas for priority action.

Strengths

- As in 2010, the large majority of provision for early years and childcare is good or better. Some of it is outstanding and there are no inadequate settings. Since last year, five of the local authority's nine children's centres have been inspected. All are good, apart from one which is satisfactory with good aspects. A recurring theme in the reports is the need to strengthen systems of evaluation.
- For children under five, the very large majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is good or better and almost a fifth of it is outstanding; a picture that is very similar to last year. The achievement of five-year-olds at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with the averages for similar areas and across the country, although it has fluctuated over the last five years and has not improved at the same rate as nationally. The gap in achievement between five-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age has narrowed over the last two years.
- The large majority of primary schools are good or better. Last year, there was one inadequate school. With extensive and highly effective support from the local authority, this school is now satisfactory with good capacity to make further improvements. The attainment of 11-year-olds is in line with similar areas and above the national average. The improvements made last year have been sustained and the provisional figures for 2011 indicate that that this continues to be the case.
- As in 2010, the very large majority of secondary schools are good or better and none of them is inadequate. Since last year, a further school has been judged to be outstanding. Two recent subject inspections show that in one school provision for mathematics is good and, in another, the overall effectiveness of art, craft and design provision is outstanding.

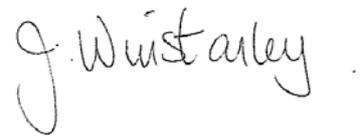
- Since last year, one of the special schools run by the local authority has been re-inspected and has improved from satisfactory to good. One of the factors highlighted in the report were the strong links between the school and the local authority. In its most recent inspection, the pupil referral unit was judged to be satisfactory rather than good as it had been previously. However, the rate of progress has increased recently.
- The gap in achievement between 16-year-olds with special education needs and others of the same age has narrowed over the last two years.
- Last year, both the children's homes run by the local authority were good. Since then, both of them have been re-inspected and one was judged to have improved to outstanding. Of the seven children's homes commissioned from other agencies or local authorities, four are outstanding, two are good and one is satisfactory. The local authority's fostering and adoption services have not been re-inspected since last year. Therefore, they both continue to be rated as good.
- The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds who are out of work or not in education or training is lower than in similar areas. This has been the case for the last five years.
- The proportion of 19-year-olds who achieve the equivalent of two A level passes is higher than the averages nationally and for similar areas. Since last year, there has been a slight change in post-16 provision, with one secondary sixth form now being judged satisfactory when previously all of those inspected were good or better. However, as in 2010, two of the four sixth forms continue to be outstanding.

Areas for further improvement

- Despite the very good provision in secondary schools, the rate of persistent absence in 2008/9 and 2009/10 was worse than in similar areas. Results for 16-year-olds achieving five A* to C, including English and mathematics, at GCSE changed little between 2009 and 2010 while elsewhere they improved. Results continued to be in line with similar areas but moved from being above the national average to being in line with it. Provisional figures for 2011 indicate that results have now improved. From 2009 to 2010, the gap in achievement between 16-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age increased, so that it was wider than in similar areas and across the country. Recent provisional figures suggest that the situation has improved.

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