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Ms Gail Quinton  
Director of Children's Services  
Worcestershire County Council  
County Hall  
Spetchley Road  
Worcester  
Worcestershire WR5 2YA

Dear Ms Quinton

## 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.

## Worcestershire County Council children's services assessment 2011

Children's services assessment	Performs poorly (1)
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Children's services in Worcestershire County Council perform poorly because of inadequacies in safeguarding. In August 2010, an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection took place. This identified an area for priority action because of weaknesses relating to inconsistent performance, unclear thresholds for referral and ineffective performance management and quality assurance. In November 2010, a full inspection of safeguarding found that there had been only limited progress and safeguarding remained inadequate. In July 2011, a further unannounced inspection was conducted of contact, referral and assessment arrangements for children in need and children who may be in need of protection. This reported that there had been significant improvements and there were no areas for priority action. However, until a further full inspection of safeguarding services has taken place, the local authority will continue to be assessed as performing poorly.

The large majority of the other services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good or better and help children and young people to stay safe and enjoy learning. The strengths and areas for improvement have not changed significantly since last year. As found elsewhere, more schools have become academies. Previous inspection judgements for these schools have been taken into account in the assessment.

### Strengths

- The very large majority of early years and childcare providers are good or better, which is very similar to last year. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of day care providers that are outstanding and a fifth of them now belong to that category. Since last year, four of the local authority's 34 children's centres have been inspected. Two of these are good, with one having outstanding capacity to improve. The other two are satisfactory. A common recommendation in the reports is that services should focus more clearly on specific groups of users, including fathers.
- For children under five, the large majority of provision in nurseries and primary schools is good or better and some of it is outstanding; a similar situation to 2010. Over the last five years, the achievement of five-year-olds at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has risen from being below to being in line with the averages nationally and for similar areas. 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.

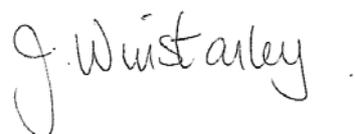
- The large majority of primary schools continue to be good or better and the number of inadequate schools has reduced from five to two. One of these schools has received a monitoring report which shows that, with considerable support from the local authority, it is making satisfactory progress. Results for 11-year-olds match the averages nationally and for similar areas. Provisional results for 2011 show that they have improved.
- The proportion of 16-year-olds achieving five A\* to C at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has improved over the last five years and is in line with the averages nationally and for similar areas. The same is true of the proportion of 19-year-olds gaining the equivalent of two A level passes. The gap in attainment between 16-year-olds from low-income families and others of the same age is wider than the average nationally but in line with similar areas.
- As in 2010, eight of the 12 fostering and adoption services are good or better and none of them is inadequate.
- All six of the children's homes run by the local authority are good or better and two of them are outstanding. Of the 19 homes commissioned from other agencies or local authorities, 18 are good or better and the remaining one is satisfactory.

### **Areas for further improvement**

- Restructuring of secondary schools means that, between 2010 and July 2011, seven schools have closed and become academies. Five of these were outstanding, one was good and one was inadequate. Even when these schools are taken into account, over a third of secondary provision is still no better than satisfactory. Since August 2011, five further schools have become academies.
- As in 2010, the quality of post-16 provision continues to be too variable and not enough of it is better than satisfactory.
- Since last year, the number of pupil referral units in the local authority has reduced from nine to three. Last year there was no inadequate provision. However, one short-stay school was recently judged to be inadequate, with inadequate capacity to improve.

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 cursive script that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley  
Divisional Manager, Children's Services Assessment